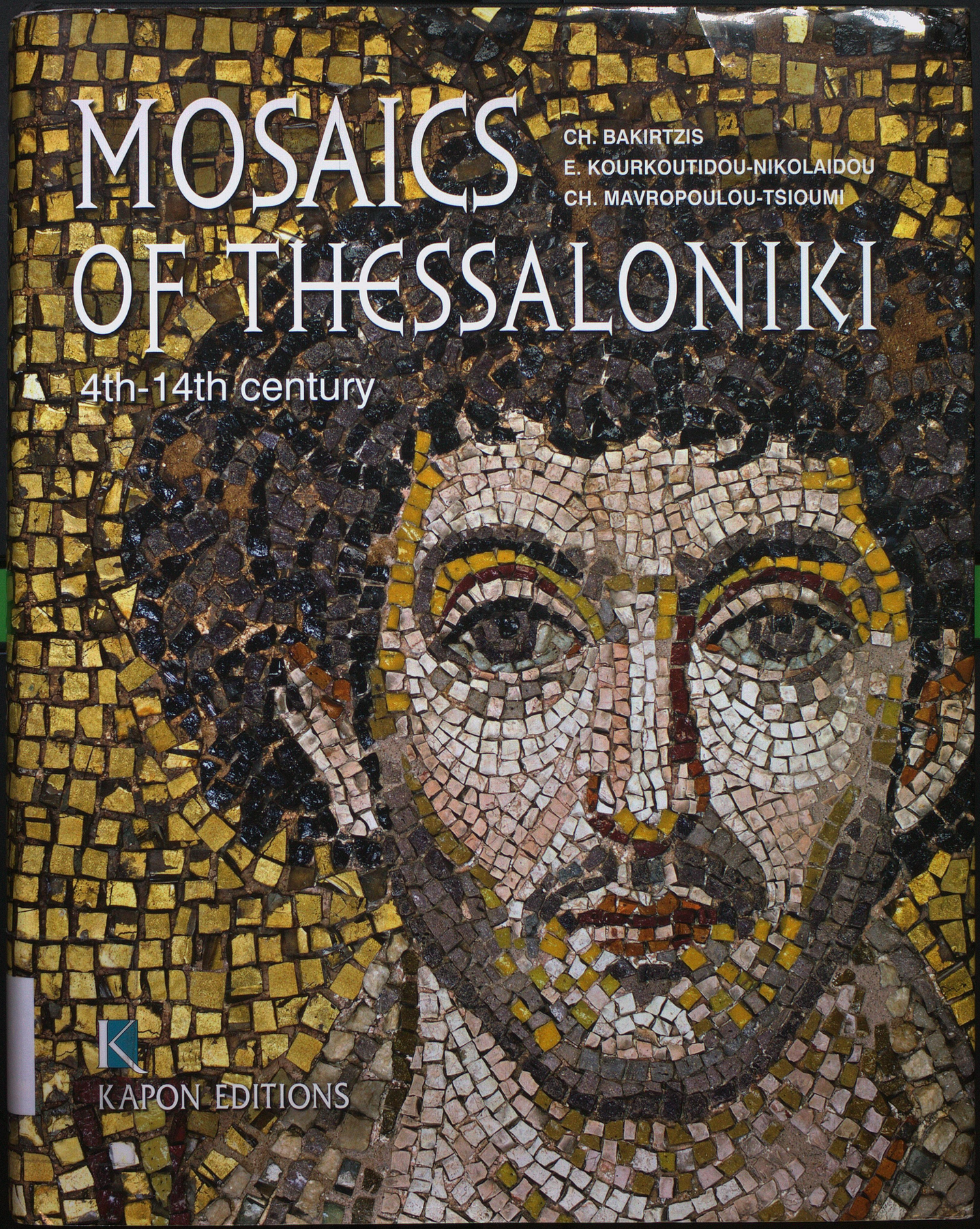
MOSAICS OF THESSALONIKI

CH. BAKIRTZIS
E. KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU
CH. MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

4th-14th century



KAPON EDITIONS

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4th-14th century

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KAPON EDITIONS
23-27 Makriyanni Str., Athens 117 42, Greece
Tel./Fax: (+30) 210 9235 098, 210 9214 089
e-mail: info@kaponeditions.gr
www.kaponeditions.gr

ISBN 978-960-6878-36-7

CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS
EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU
CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

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Editor
CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

Translation
ALEXANDRA DOUMAS

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Kunstgeschichtliches Institut
UNIV.
MAINZ
Kal

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KAPON EDITIONS

The authors dedicate the book
to their teacher Stylianos Pelekanidis

and

Rachel Kapon to Sam Samouel, who taught her
to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of art

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Over forty years ago, when we visited the Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki for the first time, to get to know and study the technique of the mural mosaics, we never imagined that the moment would come when we would undertake the publication of a book on these masterpieces of Byzantine art.

In 1980, whilst preparing the guidebook *Wandering in Byzantine Thessaloniki*, we had the privilege of touring the monuments again, with its authors, Eftychia Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou and Anastasia Tourta. They transmitted to us their love of these creations and opened the way for us into the fascinating world of Byzantium. We stood awestruck before the mosaics of the Rotunda, barely a breath away, up on the scaffolding that had been erected for their conservation. It was then that we felt the need to share this remarkable experience with others through the pages of a book, which would convey the beauty and the spirituality these works emit.

In the following years, and as the protracted process of conserving the mosaics was drawing to a close, we drafted a plan, together with Eftychia Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, Chrysanthi Mavropoulou-Tsioumi and Charalambos Bakirtzis, of the work stages that such a volume demanded.

The texts were written in parallel with the photographing of the monuments, an extremely difficult task due to the size of the mosaics as well as the height of the buildings they adorn. The photography would not have achieved the desired results without the substantial assistance of the then Ephor of Byzantine Antiquities Charalambos Bakirtzis, the archaeologist Pelli Mastora and the conservator Nikos Pitsalidis, head of the mosaics conservation project.

It is noteworthy that to this day, in the few publications relating to the Byzantine mosaics of Thessaloniki old photographs are reproduced, which fail to capture the refinement and perfection of their art.

From the time of the First World war, countries such as France, Great Britain and Russia had expressed lively interest in studying the Byzantine monuments of Thessaloniki. *Les monuments chrétiens de Salonique* by Ch. Diehl, M. Le Tourneau and H. Saladin, published in Paris in 1918, is still the only book that gives a general picture of both the Byzantine monuments and the mosaics.

That is why we considered it an obligation to our country to publicize these treasures and to present them not only to the Greek public but to all admirers of Byzantine art, through a scientifically documented and superbly illustrated volume.

We believe that the book *Mosaics of Thessaloniki, 4th-14th century*, which fills a major void in the international bibliography, will carry the spiritual and artistic achievements of the Byzantine Age all over the world. We express our sincerest thanks to the authors, the photographers and all those who have contributed to the completion of this monumental work.

MOSES AND RACHEL KAPON



CONTENTS

12
PROLOGUE
CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

14
INTRODUCTION
CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

48
ROTUNDA
CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU

128
SAINT DEMETRIOS
CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

180
LATOMOU MONASTERY
EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

196
ACHEIROPOIETOS
EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU

238
HAGIA SOPHIA
CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

296
HOLY APOSTLES
CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

354
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PROLOGUE

It is well known that all periods of Byzantine art are represented in the monuments of Thessaloniki. Indeed, this city's mural mosaics are masterpieces of inestimable historical and artistic value. Yet, they have not been given the attention they deserve. There are no relevant monographs, nor is there a good series of recent photographs which would make these works accessible both to researchers and the general public, and old photographs, such as those taken by Max Hirmer in the Rotunda, are still reproduced. In the early twentieth century, in the context of the Eastern Question and whilst Thessaloniki was in the throes of the Balkan wars and the First World war, there was intensive international interest in its Byzantine monuments because the city was then at the epicentre of military operations and political fomentations. After its liberation in 1912, the cessation of hostilities and the transformation of Thessaloniki into a European city of northern Greece and seaport of the Balkans, large-scale restoration works were carried out on the principal churches, so that they might be used again for Christian worship (Acheiropoietos, St Demetrios, Latomou Monastery, Hagia Sophia, Holy Apostles). However, scholarly interest in the monuments was confined almost to a local level. During the interwar years, dominant figure in the affairs of Thessaloniki's Byzantine monuments was Andreas Xyngopoulos, under whose direction important discoveries and conservations of mosaics were made, as in the Latomou Monastery and the church of the Holy Apostles.

After the Second World war, the responsible Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities undertook major projects, under the direction of the Ephor of Byzantine Antiquities Stylianos Pelekanidis (1943-1962). It was then, for example, that restoration work was completed (1948) in St Demetrios, a large part of which had been destroyed in the 1917 fire, the mosaics in the Rotunda were conserved on the occasion of the IX International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Thessaloniki in 1953, and of Hagia Sophia later. Works were continued in the 1960s and 1970s by the Ephors of Byzantine Antiquities Phani Drosogianni, Myron Michailidis, Pavlos Lazaridis, Efthymios Tsigaridas.

A turning point for the consolidation, conservation and study of the Thessalonikan monuments and their mosaics was the 1978 earthquakes. The Archaeological Service of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture joined forces with the Agency for the Restoration of Earthquake Damage in Northern Greece (ΥΑΣΒΕ) of the Ministry of Public Works to organize and implement, for the first time, an extensive programme to rescue and conserve the monuments, their mosaics and wall-paintings. This was done with the supervision of an interdisciplinary team led by Stylianos Pelekanidis, Professor Emeritus of Byzantine Archaeology at the University of Thessaloniki, and with the participation of the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki through the Ephor Eftychia Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou.

The authors of the book were consecutively for forty years, from 1976 onwards, the Ephors of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki: Eftychia Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou (1976-1981, 1986-1996), Chrysanthi Mavropoulou-Tsioumi (1981-1986) and Charalambos Bakirtzis (1996-2007). After the 1978 earthquakes and primarily during the critical period after 1981, when the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki assumed full responsibility for the projects, they directed not only the consolidation, conservation and presentation of the precious mosaics and their restoration, but also all works on the monuments of Thessaloniki, together with their collaborators – archaeologists, architects and conservators of the Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki, who worked with devotion and frequently in very difficult conditions. Warm thanks are due to all.

The necessary research carried out prior to embarking on the works as well as whilst they were in progress revealed new evidence and enriched our knowledge of the mural mosaics of Thessaloniki, giving scholars the opportunity to study and connoisseurs to enjoy these monumental creations of Byzantine art.

With this book the authors offer what they have gained from their contact over the years with the wonderful world of the mural mosaic and specifically the mosaics of Thessaloniki. Thanks are due to the 9th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities of Thessaloniki for providing material from the archive of photographs and drawings. We express our gratitude to the British School at Athens for permission to publish drawings and photographs from its archive, and to the philologist Thodoros Mavropoulos for kindly reading the Greek texts and his constructive linguistic and literary comments.

The authors are particularly grateful to Kapon Editions, which years ago had expressed the desire to publish for the first time the corpus of surviving Byzantine mural mosaics of Thessaloniki. And this it has done.

CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

INTRODUCTION

Mural mosaics are the most splendid and impressive genre of art bequeathed to mankind by the Early Christian and the Byzantine Age. The gleaming gold and silver, the varied colours, the brilliance of the tesserae used in these works, made them a joy to behold and elevated the spirit to a transcendental sphere, far removed from earthly cares. The tesserae reflect and radiate the light, depending on the illumination entering the building, thus making visible the concept of the 'uncreated' light of the Christian religion.

The art of mural mosaic is not a creation of the Christian era. It was used first by the Romans. However, after the triumph of Christianity, it was developed to a high level of excellence, because it was able to render the spirituality of the new religion. Spirituality was not new. It had begun to appear already in the arts of Late Antiquity, particularly in Rome and in Egypt, as consequence of the contact of Hellenic civilization with the art of the East, which took place after the campaigns of Alexander the Great. Concurrently with the preservation of the Greek classical tradition, attempts to create an expressionistic art capable of conveying psychological introspection had gradually appeared. These two elements created the substrate of Early Christian and Byzantine art, and never ceased to coexist.

The new religion required its own thematic repertoire and its own visual language. Of course, during the persecutions of the Christians, a 'symbolic' art had been created, principal iconographic element of which is the cross, which continued to be depicted later too. New subjects began to appear in all genres of Early Christian and, subsequently, Byzantine art. The depiction of holy figures, which the Fathers of the Church supported in their texts, was based on the doctrine of the Incarnation. God became man and sanctified matter, which is why the divine can be represented by matter. However, because, according to Christian belief, man's body wrestles with his soul in the effort to achieve perfection, Christian art refused to render the corporeality of figures and concentrated on painting, which, by using forms and colours, was able to make visible the invisible. Thus, the weight fell on rendering the inner world of the figures.

1

1. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. The magnificence of the interior. In the conch the mosaic of the enthroned Virgin and Child, a ninth-century work of high-quality art.

Although Christian art, including, of course, mosaics, drew elements from Graeco-Roman tradition, it represented another imagined world with expressionistic figures and with a different concept of space. This does not follow the natural perspective rendering but is transformed into metaphysical space (Heavenly Jerusalem, Paradise). Indeed, in order to achieve transcendentalism in the compositions, initially a blue ground was used and later, particularly in the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565), the gold ground. After all, gold, which does not tarnish, symbolizes the imperishable divine light and the transcendental nature of Christ.

The Edict of Milan (313) and, especially, the declaration of Christianity not only as the official but also as the sole religion of the State, in the reign of Emperor Theodosios I (379-395), opened the way for building churches and decorating them with mosaics or wall-paintings. The cross, paramount symbol of the Christian faith, then acquired a special place, both in mosaics and in wall-paintings. At the same time, certain elements of the art of Late Antiquity were adopted, while new ones were created too, in which the progressive influence of the doctrine and of the Christian liturgy were obvious. So, by the end of the fourth century, alongside the youthful type of Christ, which brings to mind representations of Apollo, Eros or Bacchus, the type of the bearded Christ was created too, which is reminiscent of representations of Zeus or Asklepios. Christ is depicted in a transcendental environment (Heavenly Jerusalem, Paradise) or is portrayed as an emperor, now flanked by Angels, rather than by the Nikai (Victories) which accompanied the deified emperor in Roman times. In the fourth to the fifth century, and particularly after the Ecumenical Council of Ephesos (431), which recognized Mary as Mother of God (Theotokos), the Virgin too began to be depicted.

The first three centuries after the official recognition of the Christian religion (4th, 5th and 6th) were a period of inquiries and of elaboration of new subjects as well as the new art form. The role of the emperors, of the Church and of the artists in this process is beyond doubt. These very factors contributed also to the thematic and stylistic renewal of Christian art in the ensuing centuries, because Byzantine art, for all its adherence to tradition, always had the possibility of renewal.

Decoration with mosaics was an expensive and laborious process, which presupposed donors-dedicators with considerable economic means (emperors, prelates, noblemen, officials). That is why mosaics represent the official art of the empire, which expressed the majesty of the Christian faith, the State and the emperor. Painting and particularly mosaics, with their lustre and splendour, could also play an important didactic role, given that the declaration of Christianity as official and sole religion of the State, in the reign of Theodosios I, did not mean necessarily that everyone accepted the new faith. From the fourth century onwards, the elevation of the soul, which the triumphal Christian faith offered, and the unquestionable supremity of the State, created a climate conducive to the creation of works of art.

Almost nothing survives of the mural mosaics that surely existed in Early Christian buildings of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern State. However, mosaic pavements uncovered there attest the high level of the art that had developed in Constantinople and had radiated to other regions of Christendom. Important mural mosaics of this period are preserved in three cities: Rome, Ravenna and Thessaloniki. On the basis of these, we can form a picture of the perceptions and inquiries of Christian mosaic art, which was in its infancy both in content and in manner of expression. Specifically Thessaloniki, where works survive with some historical continuity into the fourteenth century, offers a better picture. In order to understand

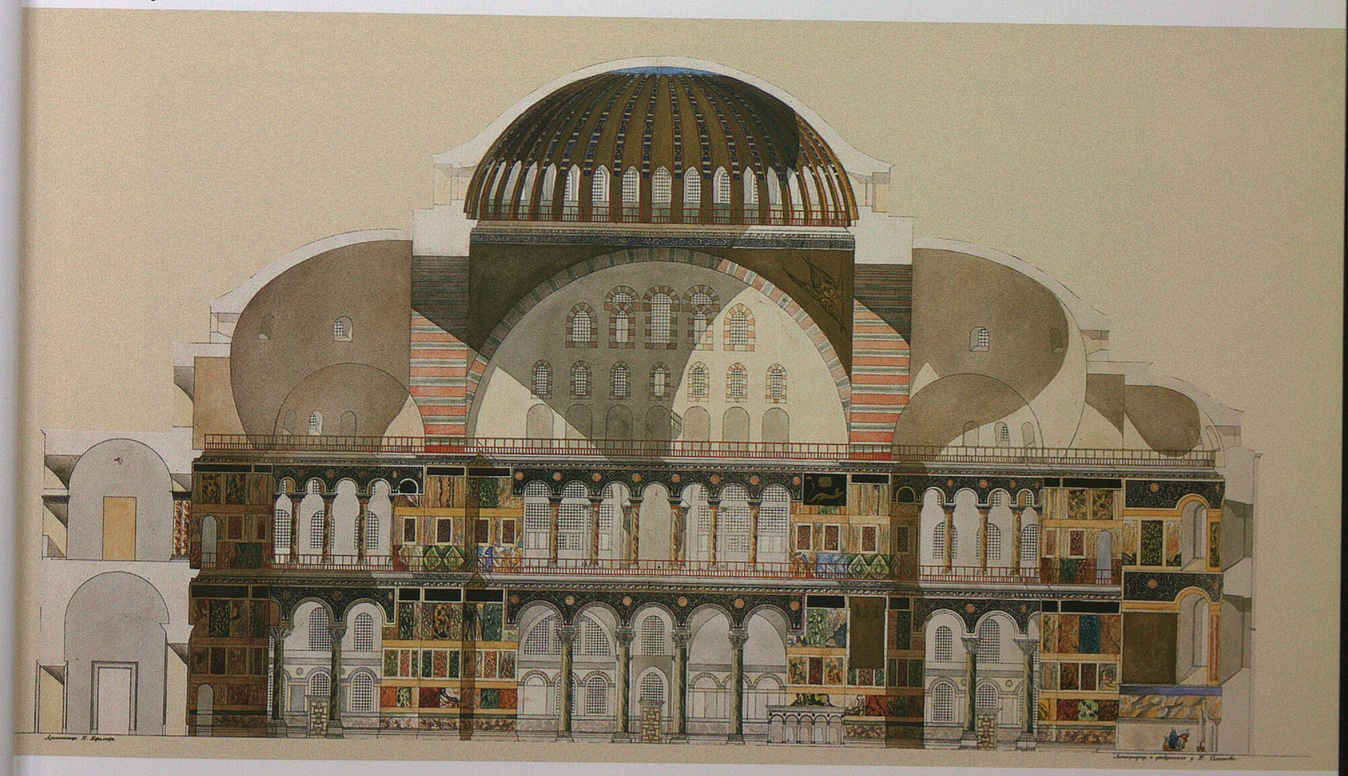
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2. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. Façade of the church. Color lithograph. N.E. Efimov, 1835. Moscow, Pushkin Museum.

3. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. Longitudinal section. Color lithograph. N.E. Efimov, 1835. Moscow, Pushkin Museum.

3



4



4. The map shows the places where the most important Early Christian and Byzantine mosaics are preserved.

the place of Thessaloniki within the overall artistic output of the Early Christian and the Byzantine Age, a brief review of the course of the art of mural mosaics in this city, in comparison with other regions, will be attempted here, to the degree, of course, that the extant works permit.

Thanks to its location in the inner reaches of the Thermaic Gulf, betwixt East and West, North and South, Thessaloniki was an important centre in the Haemus Peninsula (Balkans) already from Roman times. After the founding of Constantinople in 330, Thessaloniki found herself in a pivotal position between the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire. The city was subject administratively to Constantinople, but ecclesiastically to Rome, until 731/2. Its thriving economy, based on trade and the agricultural production of its hinterland, also ensured favourable conditions for artistic creation. The significance of Thessaloniki in Early Christian times is apparent also from the fact that in the fourth century both Emperor Constantine the Great and Emperor Theodosios the Great resided there for some time –mainly to confront problems of enemy incursions– and constructed public works and monuments. As the monuments attest, the city's relations with the Capital continued throughout the Byzantine Age.

The Early Christian mosaics surviving in Thessaloniki are not securely dated, which is why the datings proposed at various times range, sometimes for the same monument, from the fourth to the sixth century.

The most enigmatic of the surviving works is the enormous mosaic in the dome of the Rotunda, which has been dated from the fourth to the sixth century (see chapter on the Rotunda, p. 48 ff.). The mosaic is strongly reminiscent of works of Graeco-Roman art and gives the impression of a pagan subject that has been transformed into a Christian one. Indeed, it has been proposed recently that both the monument and its decoration are a work of Constantine the Great, which has been dated to 322-324. The mosaics in the dome are not preserved in their entirety. Nonetheless, what has remained impresses by virtue of its size, subject and excellent execution. The work is the tangible and visible testimony of the successful endeavour to link Graeco-Roman tradition with Christian spirituality, particularly in the figures depicted in front of grand fantastical buildings that bring to mind Pompeii. The skilful drawing, the chromatic wealth with tonal gradations of the same colour, the use of splendid decorative motifs, the attention to detail and, above all, the expressiveness and introspection of the figures, point to a mature and highly accomplished workshop, which created a global master-

piece of art. Such a work was surely due to imperial patronage and is linked with the art of Constantinople. Imperial grandeur is apparent in the heroic mien of the figures, in the reflective gaze of the insightful eyes, which lead beyond the earthly world, and to the insubstantiation of the bodies. The subject of the mosaics, whether it is an apotheosis of the emperor or a divine Epiphany, is magnificent in conception and execution. This is a ground-breaking work of inestimable artistic value, which certainly influenced the art of its period, as well as of periods to come.

Works displaying a certain affinity to this ambitious mosaic are to be found in Ravenna in Italy, seat of the last Byzantine emperors of the Western Roman State and, in continuation, of the king of the Goths, Theodoric (493-526). Specifically, the figure of the Good Shepherd in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, stepsister of Emperor Honorius (395-423), recalls in its spirituality of expression and transcendental air the mosaic in the Rotunda, without there being absolute identity.

Likewise, the mosaic in the dome of the Orthodox Baptistery, for which Bishop Neon showed solicitude *circa* 450, is similar in compo-

5. Ravenna. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, stepsister of the Emperor Honorius (395-423). Depiction of the Good Shepherd (Christ), who symbolizes the salvation of mankind. 4th century.

5



sition to the mosaic in the Rotunda. It too is an opulent synthesis in three zones, with the representation of the Baptism, which symbolizes the salvation of the soul, at the apex of the dome. Depicted in the middle zone are the Apostles with wreaths –symbols of victory– in their hands, in a procession that brings to mind imperial art. Their bodies imitate Roman statues. In the lower zone, luxurious imaginary buildings with thrones, altar tables and open Gospel-books create a transcendental world. The luxury of the composition relates to the kingdom of God, which will receive the believers at the Last Judgement. The subject is grand and complex in conception, bespeaking profound theological knowledge, and is associated with the desire to express doctrinal opinions. The artistic quality of this work, which impresses with the variety of colours and the conspicuous use of gold against the blue ground, is also reminiscent of imperial art. However, despite the similarity in the organization of the subject, this representation lacks the resplendence of the Rotunda mosaics.

There is a comparable mosaic composition in the so-called Arian Baptistery in Ravenna, a building of the Ostrogoth king Theodoric. It depicts in two zones the Baptism of Christ (first zone) and the Apostles (second zone) holding wreaths and proceeding towards the throne of the Hetoimasia (Preparation), symbolizing the Last Judgement. The figures are static and standardized, and the work consequently lacks the artistic inspiration of the mosaic in the Orthodox Baptistery, and even more so of the composition in the Rotunda.

The only surviving mosaics in the basilica of the Panagia Acheiropoietos in Thessaloniki (see chapter on the Acheiropoietos, p. 196 ff.) are on the intrados of the arches of the two colonnades in the ground floor and the one colonnade in the gallery. They consist of vegetal, geometric and symbolic motifs. This is a work of symbolic art, of the mid-fifth century, which depicts a paradisial, celestial space. The competent drawing and the sensitive coloration of the mosaics are on a par with contemporary works in Rome and Ravenna, and particularly in the Orthodox Baptistery in the latter city.

In the conch of the small cruciform church of the Latomou monastery, the mosaic with subject the Theophany, which is dated to the second half of the fifth century, is unique in terms of both content and execution (see chapter on Latomou monastery - Hosios David, p. 180 ff.). Revealing a complex theological conception and a high artistic standard, it is in the same clime as the mosaics in the Rotunda, although not identified absolutely with them. The representation echoes the same triumphal ideology, together with the teaching of the salvation of the soul through the house of God. This is an at once

6



6. Ravenna. Baptistery of the Orthodox. The mosaic in the dome, in three zones: the Baptism, the Apostles in procession with victory wreaths and fantastical buildings with thrones, altar tables and Gospel-books. 5th century.

suggestive and optimistic mosaic, as is apparent from the amicable beardless figure of Christ and his triumphant movement. Hellenic tradition is obvious in this work, which at the same time imposes with its transcendentalism. Its quality can be appreciated better if it is compared with the mosaic in the sanctuary conch of the parekklesion of St Akylinos in Milan (Mediolanum), in which Christ is shown amidst the Apostles. This work too is dated to the fifth century but lacks the expressiveness of that in Thessaloniki. In relation to the afore-mentioned works, the mosaic in the Latomou monastery points to an advance towards more complex theological thinking.

In the church of St Demetrios, patron saint of Thessaloniki, two fifth-century mosaics survive on the east part of the west wall separating the narthex from the nave (see chapter on St Demetrios, p. 128 ff.). Depicted in one is St Demetrios with an Angel, and in the other the offering of children to the saint. These mosaics too preserve the concept of ancient Hellenic tradition, in the rendering of figures and landscape.

The corpus of extant mosaics in Thessaloniki bears witness to a high standard both in the choice and organization of subjects, and in the quality of the art. Given that no contemporary works survive in Constantinople, it is not possible to determine securely the role the Capital played in their elaboration. Moreover, Thessaloniki's long tradition in making mosaics, as known from the mosaic pavements uncovered in the city, should also be borne in mind. We should accept that local artists at least participated in creating these works, and particularly projects on the scale of that in the Rotunda. The fact is that these are inspired works whose influence radiated over a wide ambit, playing a significant role in the development of the art of mosaic, and not only.

During the reign of Emperor Justinian (527-565), when the State was enjoying a great heyday and its borders were being expanded, the various trends attained maturity and the artistic language was crystallized. This is why the sixth century is considered as the first golden age of Byzantine art. Since no mosaics of this period have survived in Constantinople, their art can be studied in other lands, mainly in imperial works, such as the mosaic of the Transfiguration in the church of St Catherine in the Sinai monastery, a foundation of Emperor Justinian. This masterpiece, which survives intact, is austere. Mount Tabor, where the event took place, is not yet represented, nor is the landscape in general. The weight of the representation falls on the introspection in the expression and the movements of the figures.

Most works of this period are to be found in Ravenna, which was

7



7. Ravenna. Baptistery of the Arians. Depicted in the dome are the Baptism and the Preparation of the throne (Hetoimasia), towards which the Apostles process. Symbolism of the Last Judgement. 5th-6th century.

centre of political and cultural activities of the region after the expansion of the Byzantine Empire into Italy, in Justinian's reign.

The works in this city represent the official art, wellspring of which was Constantinople and the imperial and ecclesiastical authority.

Unique works, which project the magnificence of the emperor and his court, are the mosaics showing Justinian and Theodora offering gifts, in the sanctuary conch of San Vitale. Drawing, colours and manner are quintessentially in the Byzantine style, which has by now been crystallized. These works include elements from ancient Greek tradition, but it is the transcendental element that predominates.

No works that can be dated securely to the sixth century have survived in Thessaloniki. There are, of course, proposals for dating to this period known Early Christian monuments which have been mentioned already, but all these are speculative. It seems that no major imperial project was implemented in the city at this time, or at least none has survived. Perhaps the empire's interest was focused on the new territories and Thessaloniki, which still belonged ecclesiastically to the Western Church, followed its own autonomous course.

8



8. Ravenna. San Vitale. Detail of the figure of Justinian from the representation of the procession of the emperor and his retinue. 6th century.

9. Ravenna. San Vitale. Sanctuary. The imperial couple (Justinian and Theodora) bringing gifts to the church. A representation of imperial majesty emphasizing the superhuman nature of the Byzantine emperors. Shown here is the procession of Theodora and her retinue. 6th century.

From the mid-seventh century onwards, the transcendental and anti-classical tradition was reinforced, and the basic characteristics of an 'abstract' Byzantine style were formed. The limiting of the frontiers of the realm, due to the incursions of Persians, Avars-Slavs and Arabs,

9



dealt a serious blow to the economy, bringing the shrinking of the empire and the Graeco-Roman apparatus of State. Perhaps these difficult times were the reason why the anti-classical trend prevailed, which expressed the more general sense of insecurity, even though in the higher echelons of society classical education and tradition lived on.

Since the mosaics that have survived in Constantinople are scant and fragmentary, the picture of art in the seventh century is gained from Thessaloniki. Preserved in the church of St Demetrios are mosaics that are dedications of anonymous believers, in panels, without an overall iconographic programme (see chapter on St Demetrios, p. 128 ff.). They resemble votive offerings-cult icons, which believers dedicated to St Demetrios or to other saints, in gratitude for their help. The portraits of the builders of the church, next to the figure of St Demetrios, likewise have the character of an icon.

Evident in the seventh-century mosaics is the differentiation in the ideology of art, in relation to the fifth-century mosaics in the same church. The concept of ancient tradition has diminished both in the rendering of the figures and the treatment of the landscape. The figures become symmetrical and flat, their spirituality is emphasized and the faces are austere, with an otherworldly aspect. In other words, elements that appeared in the time of Justinian are continued and evolve. The tendency towards abstraction in the bodies and the landscape, the realism in the facial expressions, austerity and severity are elements characteristic of this difficult period for the Byzantine Empire, which Thessaloniki experienced first hand with the attacks by Avars and Slavs and its generally depressed economic situation. The works created in these years seem to have influenced, to a degree, those in other regions.

The same trends are ascertained also in monuments outside the Byzantine State. In Rome, in the side-chapel of the Lateran Baptistery of San Venanzio, the rendering of the figures of the clerics in the sanctuary brings to mind figures in the mosaics in St Demetrios, perhaps because they were a dedication of a Greek priest, *circa* 640.

Iconoclasm brought this art form to an abrupt end. Between 726 and 843, the year of the Restoration of the Icons, a large part of the painted works (mosaics and wall-paintings) was destroyed. Their place was taken by aniconic representations, because, according to the iconoclast concept, God is not 'describable'. The deeper causes of Iconoclasm may have been diverse, but the fact remains that for nigh on one hundred and fifty years conflicts were intense and destructions of artworks rife, while the development of Byzantine iconography ceased.

Very few mosaics have survived from this period and the picture of art in the time of Iconoclasm can be followed better in wall-paintings. Nonetheless, some works have survived in Constantinople and Thessaloniki, which give an idea of the choice of subjects and the stylistic trends.

Principal subject was the cross, symbolic depiction of the victory of Christianity. Various types of crosses were depicted in the church of St Irene at Constantinople, in the church of the Dormition of the Virgin (Koimesis) at Nicaea, which no longer survives, and in the church of the Holy Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia) at Thessaloniki.

The decoration in Hagia Sophia at Thessaloniki, which is on the arch of the sanctuary vault and was executed between 780 and 787 by Emperor Constantine VI, his mother Empress Irene and Bishop Theophilos, is a splendid example of the art of this period, which is due to royal patronage (see chapter on Hagia Sophia, p. 238 ff.). The delicacy and the chromatic sensitivity of this work point to an excellent craftsman. To the same period dates the cross in the sanctuary conch, faintly visible at the level of the shoulders of the figure of the Virgin, which was depicted here after the Restoration of the Icons.

Iconoclasm ended in 843, but works of art in churches were slow to appear, because tensions were still acute. The flowering of art coincides with the ascent of the so-called Macedonian dynasty to the Constantinopolitan throne. This was a time of rising prosperity for the State and in its wake came the so-called Macedonian Renaissance in spiritual and cultural life, a particularly significant period in the history of Byzantium, both from a political and a spiritual-intellectual view. It was then that the turn towards study of the ancient heritage, which had begun earlier, was intensified. The arts blossomed and the classical tendency flourished, most probably because during Iconoclasm it had continued to exist in secular works. At the same time, the conversion of the Slav peoples to Christianity opened up vast areas for disseminating the influence of Byzantine culture, and Byzantine art played a seminal role in this direction.

Since the development of religious iconography had been halted by Iconoclasm, the problem that had to be resolved was what kind of subjects could be illustrated. After theological deliberations, the system that finally held sway and continued in existence in the whole of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art, primarily in the domed churches, was that in which the painted historiation includes the Pantocrator, the prophets, the Virgin, the saints and the major feasts. Indeed, the illustration of the feasts did not follow a historical narration but the liturgical cycle within the ecclesiastical year, which included Twelve

Feasts (Dodecaorton). One other aim was to crystallize and to fix the portrait features of the sacred persons, because, according to iconodule views, 'similitude' was the main justification of the icon, since through similitude the divine grace of the original is transferred. These canons were observed also in the mosaic decoration of churches, which is why this period signals a new course in the thematic repertoire of mural mosaics.

A wonderful work of this period in Thessaloniki is the mosaic of the Ascension in the dome of Hagia Sophia, which is dated to the last two decades of the ninth century (see chapter on Hagia Sophia, p. 238 ff.). In this mosaic, with the expressionistic figures of the Apostles, the trees, the rocky landscape, the gold ground, the wealth

10



10. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. After the end of Iconoclasm, in the time of the so-called Macedonian dynasty, the sanctuary conch was decorated with the masterpiece depicting the enthroned Virgin and Child, flanked by two archangels on the sidewalls. 9th century.

11. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. One of the archangels flanking the Virgin in the sanctuary conch. 9th century.

of colours and the manner of its composition, classical and anti-classical trends coexist. It is an impressive work that expresses the spirit of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance and must have had a major impact on the art of the period, which was experiencing a fresh start.

A mosaic of corresponding splendour and quality is that of the enthroned Virgin and Child in Hagia Sophia at Constantinople. The Theotokos is represented in the sanctuary apse with the two Archangels, of classical beauty, in the triumphal arch, only one of which survives. This high-standard mosaic with overt elements of ancient Greek tradition in the manner and the bodies of the figures is a work *non pareil*.

Of analogous quality was the mosaic in the Koimesis church in

11



Nicaea, which was destroyed during the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922 and is known only from photographs. Depicted in the sanctuary conch was the figure of the Virgin Hodegetria and two pairs of Angels in the triumphal arch (Principles, Authorities, Powers and Dominions), which stand beside the throne of the Hetoimasia (Preparation), symbol of the Last Judgement. The style of these mosaics was very close to the spirit of those in Hagia Sophia at Constantinople and Hagia Sophia at Thessaloniki.

The Virgin in the sanctuary conch in the church of Hagia Sophia at Thessaloniki, depicted against a glowing gold ground, is more expressive of the anti-classical trend. However, there are problems concerning the dating of the work, even though the iconographic elements and stylistic traits tend to advocate its inclusion in about this period. In any case, the coexistence of classical and non-classical tendencies in the decoration of one monument is observed in several monuments of Byzantine art, and indeed in Hagia Sophia itself at Constantinople.

There are no tenth-century mosaics in Thessaloniki. The dire economic situation, the destruction of the city by the Saracens in 904, the incursions by the Bulgars and a famine in 927 militated against the creation of costly works of art. However, the absence of mosaics in Thessaloniki continues until the fourteenth century and the question is whether such works existed and have not survived. The picture of art in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries is filled out by works in Constantinople, the provinces and in places far distant from the Capital.

The eleventh-century mosaic in the gallery of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, depicting Christ with Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (1042-1055) and Empress Zoe, is a typical representation of imperial glory. The face of the emperor replaced that of an earlier figure of Romanos IV Argyros (1028-1034), who was Zoe's first husband. Despite the austerity and the manner of the composition, the gold ground, the opulent imperial raiment, the impressive deep-blue garment of Christ and the painterly rendering of the countenances retain many elements of the art of the so-called Macedonian Renaissance. Nonetheless, there is also a linear treatment that is characteristic of the eleventh century.

The reason why major mosaic works were executed in the provinces in the eleventh century is not certain. The suppression of piracy in the second half of the tenth century perhaps favoured the development of Greece and the emperors showed an interest in this. Indeed, Emperor Basil II the Bulgar-slayer, after his resounding victory over the Bulgars (1018), visited Athens, in order to boost the

12

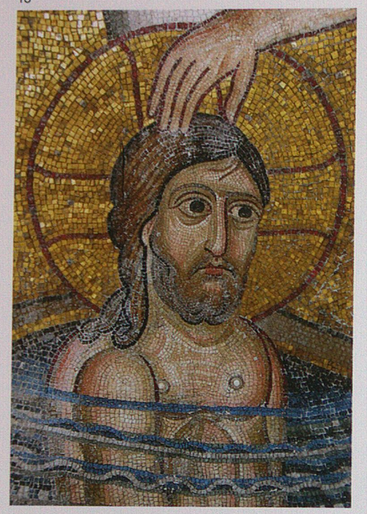


morale of the populations in the regions that had suffered attacks. It is also possible that scions of aristocratic families took care to collect the monies necessary for making the mosaics.

In the mosaics in the Daphni monastery in Athens, the classical art typical of the tenth century and manifested mainly in manuscript miniatures, lives on. There are no historical data for dating these resplendent mosaics, which is why suggested dates range from the tenth (Macedonian Renaissance) to the end of the eleventh century, despite the fact that their humanist and classicistic character is not consistent with the eleventh century. A more recent study dated the mosaics to the reign of Constantine VI Porphyrogennetos (913-

12. Daphni monastery. The representation of the Betrayal. The serene figure of Christ and the tension on the faces of the Apostles convey the sentiments at this tragic moment. 10th-11th century.

13



14



15



13. Monastery of Hosios Loukas. Detail from the Baptism. Christ, naked within the river, is baptized by John the Baptist. 11th century.

14. Nea Moni, Chios. Detail from the Crucifixion. The Myrrh-bearing women. 11th century.

15. Monastery of Hosios Loukas. Detail from the Baptism. The personification of the River Jordan, with eyes wide open on beholding the miracle of the sanctification of the waters during the Baptism. 11th century.

959). Certainly the work is linked with a Constantinopolitan workshop and its quality qualifies it as a *chef d'oeuvre* of Byzantine art.

Rich mosaic decoration with Gospel scenes and a host of figures of saints is preserved in the church of Hosios Loukas at Steiri in Boeotia. The iconographic programme of each space in the church corresponds to its liturgical use, a practice also continued later. Although the mosaics are of high quality in materials and execution, in terms of style there is a linear rendering in the symmetrical and few-figured compositions. The rather squat figures with large ecstatic eyes express a transcendental cosmos. In other words, they return to earlier concepts but in another form and another artistic language, which represents the conservative theological climate of the time. The same elements exist in wall-paintings too, and in all other forms of art in this period.

In the Nea Moni on the island of Chios, which tradition has it was founded by Constantine IX Monomachos in the mid-eleventh century, the figures are more slender and supple, the colour contrasts and the alternations of light and shade more strident, traits pointing to a bolder advance in painting. This is a mature work in which classical elements and anti-classical trends move towards an impressive merging.

The mosaics in Hagia Sophia at Kiev, the magnificent church founded by Prince Yaroslav in the fourth decade of the eleventh century, appear to have received the cultural influence of Byzantium and of the style followed by the mosaics in Hosios Loukas. Only wall-paintings survive from this period in Thessaloniki, yet in these works analogous stylistic trends are discerned.

16



17



16. Nea Moni, Chios. Archangel Michael with the celestial orb and sceptre. 11th century.

17. Nea Moni, Chios. The Resurrection (Anastasis). Christ draws forth Adam from the sarcophagus. Eve and figures of the Righteous follow. On the other side, inside a sarcophagus, the prophet-kings and other figures await the Resurrection. 11th century.

18



The art of the first half of the twelfth century essentially continues that of the eleventh, with a somewhat softer painterly rendering of the countenances, without strong contrasts of light and shade, as can be seen in the mosaic with representation of Deesis in the katholikon of the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos, which is dated to the late eleventh-early twelfth century.

In Constantinople in this period, the splendid mosaic with the Virgin and Child, Emperor John II Komnenos and Empress Irene (*ca* 1118) offering their gifts to the church, was made in the gallery of Hagia Sophia. In terms of style, a different manner begins to appear in the figures with the slim bodies and the radiant faces with subtle use of light and shade, traits that exist also in contemporary wall-paintings. In Greece, there were mosaics in the Metropolis (cathedral) of Serres, of which only the figure of Apostle Andrew from the scene of the Communion of the Apostles survives.

The second half of the twelfth century witnessed the so-called Komnenian Renaissance. Important ensembles of wall-paintings, in which intense emotional situations are expressed, indicate the course of art in these troubled times. Concurrently, however, a more tranquil and academic art continues in existence as well. There are no mosaics of this period within Byzantine territory, perhaps because the Komnenos dynasty

19



had to contend with the West, the schism of the Churches, the Norman invasions, the Crusades, and the economic competition from the emerging mercantile cities of the Italian Peninsula. These historical circumstances led to the so-called dynamic Komnenian style of the second half of the twelfth century, which can be seen in the surviving wall-paintings.

The art of mosaic in this period can be appreciated from examples outside the borders of the Byzantine realm: in Italy, Sicily, Palestine, Russia and Georgia. Kings and dukes used this art genre to enhance their prestige and majesty, inviting Byzantine craftsmen to create mosaics in important monuments.

The basilica of San Marco in Venice, 'side-chapel' of the Doges' Palace, was decorated with mosaics. Very few survive from the eleventh century; most were made in the second half of the twelfth and the thirteenth century. So great is the host of mosaics and so many are the interventions made to these from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century, that our picture of this impressive ensemble is weakened. It seems that various teams worked on this ambitious project, with the participation of local craftsmen, and that the Byzantine artists gradually received Western influences and moved away from metropolitan art. The San Marco mosaics are in an anti-classical vein, but with adulteration of the Byzantine manner.

18. Constantinople. Hagia Sophia. The mosaic depicting the imperial couple (John II Komnenos and Irene) offering their gifts to the Virgin. The offering of gifts to the Church added prestige to imperial authority. 12th century.

19. Venice. San Marco. Scene from the life of St Mark. 12th century.

20. Venice. San Marco. The interior of the church with the wealth of mosaics. 12th and 13th century.


SCS
CASTO
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SCS · COSMAS · SCS · DAMIANVS

The Norman kings of Sicily, who vied with the Byzantine emperors, decorated four important churches with mosaics, in order to give prestige and majesty to their rule. The mosaics in these churches echo the art of Constantinople, where corresponding works of the period have been lost. For this reason the Sicilian works are precious testimonies for following the course of this genre. Roger II decorated the royal chapel (Cappella Palatina) in Palermo in 1143 and the cathedral at Cefalù in 1148. In 1143-1151, the Greek-Syrian admiral, George of Antioch, who was Roger II's Prime Minister, sponsored the mosaics in the church of Santa Maria dell' Ammiraglio, better known as La Martorana. The portrait of Roger II being crowned by Christ belies the ideology of the Norman kings and the sights they had set on the Byzantine throne.

Later, in 1180-1190, William II founded the huge basilica at Monreale, outside Palermo, the walls of which were clad with mosaics. This extensive mosaic ensemble, which follows the dynamic

21. Palermo. La Martorana. Christ crowning King Roger II. A representation intended to confirm the divine acceptance of his power. 12th century.

22. Palermo, Monreale. King Guillaume offering the Virgin a model of the church he founded, indication of his faith as well as his desire to increase his prestige. 12th century.

23. Sicily. Cefalù. Cathedral. Christ Pantocrator and the Virgin with archangels. Above, angels and cherubim. 12th century.

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23



Komnenian style familiar mainly from wall-paintings, present a certain mannerism and influences from Romanesque art, which variegate the Byzantine style. Certainly, local artists trained by the Byzantine masters also worked on this enormous project.

In the Lagoon of Venice, there are mosaics of Constantinopolitan character in the apse of the church of the Santa Maria Assunta on the island of Torcello, and of the church of Santa Maria e San Donato on the island of Murano. Specifically, the full-length figure of the Virgin of Torcello, of the first half of the twelfth century, is projected against a plain gold ground and imposes with its transcendental air. The large composition of the Last Judgement, on the west wall of the same church, is also clearly Byzantine in style, despite the successive interventions made in later years.

The scene of the Pentecost in Grottaferrata, near Rome, the figures of the Apostles in the apse of a side-chapel in the cathedral of Trieste, and parts of mosaics in the sanctuary of the basilica Ursiana (1112) of Ravenna give a measure of the extensive use of the art of mosaic in these regions and the influence of Byzantine culture.

Emperor Manuel Komnenos, who collaborated with the king of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem and the bishop of that city, was the donor of the mosaics executed in the basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, in 1169, work of the Greek painter Ephraim.

In distant Russia, in the early twelfth century (1108-1111), Prince Michael of Kiev adorned the church of Archangel Michael with mosaics, inviting mosaicists from Constantinople for this project. All that remains of these works is the representation of the Communion of the Apostles, which recalls the mosaics in the Daphni monastery. The figures are delicately drawn and have calm movement.

Painters from Constantinople worked, together with local assistants, on the mosaics in the katholikon of the Gelati monastery in Georgia, in 1130, only a small part of which has survived. The drawing in these mosaics (Virgin with Angels) is somewhat provincial in character and perhaps the work was commissioned from rather mediocre Byzantine craftsman.

The mosaics preserved in these countries in which Byzantine craftsmen worked, indicate that this art continued to flourish, even though very few works of this period survive in what was then Byzantine territory. No evidence exists on the role of Thessaloniki.

As is well known, outcome of the Crusades, after the Sack of Constantinople in 1204, was the establishment of Frankish rule and the founding of Latin States in the East. Only the Empire of Nicaea, the Empire of Trebizond and the Despotate of Epirus lived on as centres

of resistance to the Frankish conquest, making a vital contribution to the cultivation of national consciousness. The difficult years of the occupation by the Franks were inimical to the creation of major works in the regions under their control. Nevertheless, art continued to evolve, particularly in the genre of wall-paintings. Constantinople was no longer capable of playing a leading role. Perhaps this role was played, at least in the Balkans, by Thessaloniki, which was liberated earlier, in 1224. Artists from the city worked in the Balkans.

Two currents in art are observed in this period: one continues the Komnenian tradition of the second half of the twelfth century, but

24. Torcello. Church of the Virgin. The Virgin standing in the type of the Hodegetria is depicted against a brilliant gold ground in the sanctuary conch, as intercessor between God and men. In the lower part, the twelve Apostles who upheld and spread the Christian faith. 12th century.

24



without excesses, mainly in provincial monuments, and the other proceeds to new stylistic concepts. The figures acquire volume and are modelled with light and shade, while the architectural background acquires weight. Thessalonikan painters, and others too, were active in the free regions. The notable ensembles of wall-paintings that survive in the former Yugoslavia, works sponsored mainly by the Serbian králs, and elsewhere too (Despotate of Epirus, Empire of Trebizond), are of a very high standard, in which the ancient beauty and the monumental manner are revived. This 'volume' style, as it has been dubbed, is best expressed in the grand ensemble of wall-paintings in the church of the Holy Trinity at Sopoćani in Serbia (1260-1265). However, only scant fragments of mosaics of this period exist and no work survives in Thessaloniki.

In 1261, Michael VII Palaiologos recaptured Constantinople and gave it back its leading role as spiritual and artistic centre of the Byzantine world. The mosaic masterpiece with the representation of Deesis, in the gallery of Hagia Sophia, is believed to have been dedicated by him after regaining the city. A work of classical stateliness and profound spirituality, this mosaic expresses the new artistic trends, without excesses, not only on account of the subject but also on account of a more constrained and aristocratic concept. It is proof too of the point of perfection that the art of mosaic had attained.

Much later, *circa* 1290, the katholikon of the monastery of the Virgin Paregoretissa in Arta, in the Despotate of Epirus, was decorated with outstanding mosaics, which show a progress from the so-called 'volume' style to a more refined and classicizing rendering distinctive of the second phase of Palaiologan painting, between 1300 and 1330, which is known as the Palaiologan Renaissance.

Correspondingly, the art of the West, which in the preceding centuries followed that of Byzantium *(maniera bizantina)*, had by this period begun charting its own paths (Gothic art), but the influence of Byzantine art was still existent. The appearance of Giotto (1266-1337), who coincides with the Palaiologan Renaissance, signalled the way towards the Renaissance in the West.

In this period the art of mosaic reached its zenith. The surviving monuments which preceded are too few for us to appreciate fully the deliberations that had been developed. Only the wall-paintings help in this direction and these show that study of the ancient texts had consolidated a deep-rooted Hellenic education and had awakened Hellenic consciousness. Several of the artists are now eponymous, in contrast to the situation prevailing in earlier periods, which fact signifies also the promotion of the craftsman as an artist. Thus, a climate ripe

for incisive changes in the ideology and the forms of art was created.

It was at this time that the mosaics were made in the church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki. These were possibly a donation of Patriarch Niphon (1310-1314), founder of the said church (see chapter on the Holy Apostles, p. 296 ff.). Byzantine art was now enjoying a heyday in Thessaloniki. Artists from the city were working throughout the Balkans and some of them are eponymous.

Although the gold ground of the mosaics in the Holy Apostles was removed during the Ottoman period, the surviving compositions –albeit fragmentary– are of such a high standard that it is difficult to believe that the art of mosaic had lapsed in the city for three centuries. Rather, it should be supposed that mosaic works existed, which have not survived.

In the mosaics in the Holy Apostles, the manner of rendering the volume and the movements of the figures, the use of models from Antiquity and the bringing of the divine closer to man, are all indicative of Renaissance trends.

25. Arta. Paregoretissa. The Pantocrator from the composition in the dome, which includes Christ Pantocrator and the prophets. *Ca* 1290.

25



The same trends are observed in the extant mosaics in Constantinople, such as in the Kiliçe cami (Sts Theodore), where mosaics are few but of superb quality and are dated *circa* 1300. In the mosaics of the Pammakaristos church, which was built *circa* 1310 by the widow of Protostrator Michael Glavas Tarchaneiotes –the same lady as sponsored, with her husband, the wall-paintings of the parekklesion of St Euthymios in the basilica of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki, in 1303–, the coexistence of a 'limited classicism' and a certain conservatism can be seen.

In the Chora monastery in Constantinople, the mosaic decoration, which was made between 1315 and 1320 with sponsorship from the great legislator and man of letters of the day, Theodore Metochites, has many features in common with the mosaics in the Holy Apostles. The wealth of its iconography afforded the possibility of diverse forms of expression. The revival of the classical tradition, the humanist disposition and also a certain academicism, are overt in this work. Nonetheless, some conservative tendencies are apparent too, which represent the so-called anti-classical concept. In general, however, both this work and the mosaics in the Holy Apostles have achieved such a degree of perfection in technique and style that it is difficult to accept that a continuing tradition in this art did not exist, both in Constantinople and Thessaloniki, even if works have not survived.

The mosaics in the Holy Apostles at Thessaloniki, like the mosaics in Constantinople, point to the Renaissance course that art had taken in Byzantium in this period, as result of the new conditions. This is the period of the burgeoning of trade, of the circulation of ideas between East and West, of the awakening of the people and of its reaction to oppression. The East gave to the West and began to take from it, even if the mooted Union of the Churches was a highly contentious issue. Byzantine art in this period did not adopt the choices of the West, but the spirit of Humanism had entered its life.

The mosaics in the Holy Apostles are a last flaring of this art in Thessaloniki and in Byzantine art generally, which in these years, perhaps because of economic difficulties, is expressed all over Christendom more by painting with pigments and less by painting with tesserae. The painted works are splendid and numerous, the tessellated ones few. Brilliance and light are missing from the tesserae, just as brilliance and light are missing from the life of the empire.

Thessaloniki fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1430, Constantinople in 1453. The spiritual and intellectual men of Byzantium fled, many to the West, and contributed to its Renaissance. Many works were destroyed. If this had not happened, perhaps more examples of the wonderful art of mosaics would have survived, works that expressed so well the Christian ideology as well as the human good taste.

The contribution of Thessaloniki to this sumptuous and expensive art was by no means small. The city's mosaics expressed absolutely the currents and the historical circumstances of the times, indeed displaying a standard of art and culture almost on a par with that of Constantinople and in many cases much bolder. All its works point to the spiritual and artistic level of the men who lived here and effected its culture, which indeed radiated throughout the Balkans and even beyond.

26. Constantinople. Chora Monastery. The Dormition of the Virgin. 1315-1320.

26



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27. Constantinople. Chora Monastery. Left, the scene of the magi on horseback seeking the infant Christ, and right, their visit to King Herod in order to learn his birthplace. 1315-1320.

27



28. Constantinople. Chora Monastery. The Pantocrator and the prophets who prophesied the Incarnation of Christ. 1315-1320.

28





ROTUNDA

CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

ROTUNDA

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

The most imposing of the monuments in Thessaloniki is the Rotunda, which to this day dominates the city. It was built to the north of the palatial complex founded in 305-311 by Galerius Valerius Maximianus, caesar and subsequently augustus (AD 305) of the Roman Tetrarchy.[1] A street linked the Rotunda with the triumphal arch, erected to extol Galerius' victorious campaign in the East, in AD 297.[2] The subjects of the reliefs on the arch in Thessaloniki, as on the arch of Constantine the Great in Rome, are testimonies of the imperial ideology in Late Antiquity. Of the originally eight pillars in Galerius' arch, three still stand, as well as two archways – a high central arch and a north low one. The arch is located very close to the east Kassandran Gate of Thessaloniki, in correspondence to the arch of the west

1. Part of the central medallion in the apex of the dome with representation of the sphere of the Cosmos: Colours of the rainbow, leafy branches and fruits of a heavenly garden, and stars even brighter than the blue sky of day. The reborn phoenix with red halo radiates light.

2. Detail of the north panel in the lower zone of mosaics: Semi-vault with peacock feathers, epistyle with swans. Above, on the right a baldachin with conical roof, on the left a four-pillared pavilion with dome. A peahen listens to the silence of the scene.

3. At the edge of the palace built by Galerius in Thessaloniki in 305-311 stands the triumphal 'Arch of Galerius' with relief representations. At the far end of what was once a processional way is the Rotunda.



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4. The Rotunda dominated the area in the nineteenth century. View from the east.

5. View of the Rotunda from the southeast today. Visible are the south central entrance, the large holy bema and the tomb of sheikh Hortaji.

6. The interior of the Rotunda as a Muslim mosque named after sheikh Hortaji and known as 'Old Metropolis'. Visible are the northeast conch and the large northeast window, part of the north conch and the north window, and the holy bema on the east side with the high arch, the semi-dome of the conch and the east windows. Also, part of the lower zone of the mosaics in the dome (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

7. Longitudinal cross-section (E-W) of the Rotunda, showing the mosaics (drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

Golden Gate, constructed in 42/41 BC, to honour the victors in the battle of Philippi, Octavian and Anthony. The central thoroughfare of the city *(decumanus maximus)*, known as *Via Regia* in Roman times and as *Leophoros* in Byzantine, linked the two gates and passed under the two arches. At the arch of Galerius it intersected with the street connecting the Rotunda with the palace, along which passed formal processions in which the emperor and his retinue took part.

The prevailing view is that the Rotunda was founded as Galerius' mausoleum. However, the discovery of imperial tombs and two mausolea in the birthplace of Galerius († 311), Romuliana (pres. Gamzigrad in Serbia), reinforces the view that Galerius was not buried in Thessaloniki and that the Rotunda was a temple of Zeus or the Kabeiroi or the Sun-god Helios, or even something else. Nonetheless, it is certain that it functioned subsequently as a church and that for this Christian use some alterations were made to the monument.[3]

Various names have been proposed for the church, the most tenable of which is of the Incorporeal Saints (Asomaton) or of the Archangels, because the quarter of the city around the Rotunda was known as the *neighbourhood of the Asomaton* in Byzantine times. The corresponding gateway in the east wall was called *gate of the Asomaton*.[4] The Rotunda served as cathedral church (metropolis) of Thessaloniki between 1525 and 1591.[5] In 1591 it was converted into a Muslim place of worship, known as the Sheikh Hortaji mosque or *Old Metropolis*.[6]

ARCHITECTURE

The Rotunda is a large domed building of circular plan, set within an enclosure with two exhedras in alcoves.[7] Circular buildings are known in East and West as mausolea, martyria and baptisteries. In shape and size the Rotunda is to be paralleled with the Pantheon in Rome, and in use with the mausoleum of Emperor Diocletian (284-305) in Split, Dalmatia, although the latter is octagonal in shape and has no large windows. Generally speaking, the Rotunda is, up to the base of the dome, a cylindrical building, 24.50 m. in diameter with walls 6.30 m. thick, covered by a dome, which reaches a height of 29.80 m. above the floor. Externally the dome is covered by a low conical, three-tiered tiled roof, which rests on a cylindrical wall of smaller diameter, bedded upon the main one.

The vertical walls of the Rotunda are of stone masonry, interrupted by wide zones of brickwork for static reasons. The dome, the vaults and the arches are constructed exclusively of bricks. In the

7



6



Drawings of portraits of five men depicted in the lower zone of the mosaics (imprinted by Thomi Kakagianni, who, with the guidance of P. Mastora and the supervision of Ch. Bakirtzis, made the drawings of the mosaics in the Rotunda which are published in this chapter, with the exception of figs 31 and 70).

8. Portrait of an unidentified young soldier in the west panel. The inscription with his name and status has been removed.

9. The physician Damianos (southwest panel).

10. The soldier Eukarpion (west panel).

11. The soldier Leon (southeast panel).

12. The physician Cosmas (southwest panel).

The density of the lines on the faces, the succession of colours and the intensity of the shadows reflect the age of the figures. The praying men fall into three age groups. The younger have the comeliness of youth, the middle-aged emanate a sense of justice, and the older ones knowledge and wisdom. All the figures express dignity and piety.

interior, eight square conches with semi-cylindrical vaults, the north and south ones of which are slightly narrower than the rest, are opened in the thickness of the walls. Formed in the south conch is the main entrance, facing the Arch of Galerius and the palace. On either side of the south conch, again in the thickness of the wall, are two spiral staircases leading to an internal corridor that runs round the base of the dome.

Above the eight conches are eight large arched windows that admit abundant light into the monument's interior. Nine semicircular lunettes at the base of the dome are also associated with the natural illumination.[8] The light relieves the heaviness of the construction, giving the impression that the great dome is supported by eight built piers, which appear to be interposed between the conches and the windows. On the front of the piers are shallow quadrilateral niches in the form of aedicules.

The most important alterations made in connection with the conversion of the building into a church were the demolition of the east quadrilateral conch and the addition in its place of the wide conch of the holy bema, as well as the construction of a perimeter wall which, as a kind of circular portico, surrounded the central core and enlarged the diameter of the Rotunda to 52 m.[9] The roof of this circular portico reached to the level of the base of the large windows. A south porch and south annexes were also added, the east one of which is a mortuary chapel. Other annexes, which are no longer visible and which it is impossible to check, such as the porch in front of the entrance and crypts in the two exhedras of the enclosure, can be included among these interventions.

The collapse and reconstruction of a large part of the east side of the original single dome is associated with the addition of the holy bema. After Iconoclasm, the conch of the bema was painted with the representation of the Ascension, while its sidewalls were strengthened with two buttresses.[10] This is the form it has today.

The inside of the walls, from the floor to the dome, was formerly revetted with a marble dado. Three horizontal pseudo-cornices formed panels between them, within which there was *opus sectile*. The archivolts of the conches and the windows were emphasized by false voussoirs.[11]

8



THE MOSAICS

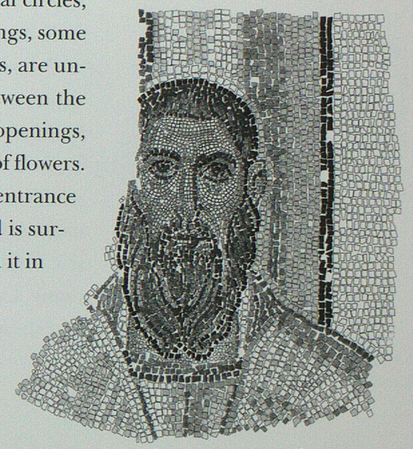
Mosaics covered the inside of the dome, the lunettes and the arches of the ground-floor conches.[12] The mosaics in the lunettes and the ground-floor conches, together with the marble dado, played a significant role in reflecting and diffusing light, the fluctuations in the intensity of which created a sense of endless space that extended beyond the interior surfaces of the building. Today this sense has been lost, because the marble dado has not survived and the mosaics are confined to about half their original area.

Guided by the sense of infinite space, the richly decorated frames of the mosaics in the ground-floor conches (see p. 121) seem to define windows open to another world, a world dominated by golden light, closer to us, or silver light, closer to God. Tangential circles, pierced-work coffers on the ceiling and imbricated openings, some of them repeating shapes in the decoration of the lunettes, are understood as open-work parcloses that are interposed between the world here and the world beyond. Visible through their openings, suspended in silence, are birds, baskets of fruits and vases of flowers.

Dominating the middle of the arch in the south conch/entrance is a large cross, which transmits the divine silver light and is surrounded by stars, birds, flowers and fruits, placed around it in cosmic order.

The colours of the tesserae in the lunettes are paler, allowing the light to enter and illumine in its natural

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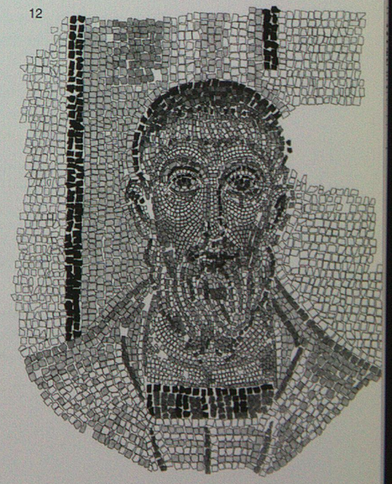
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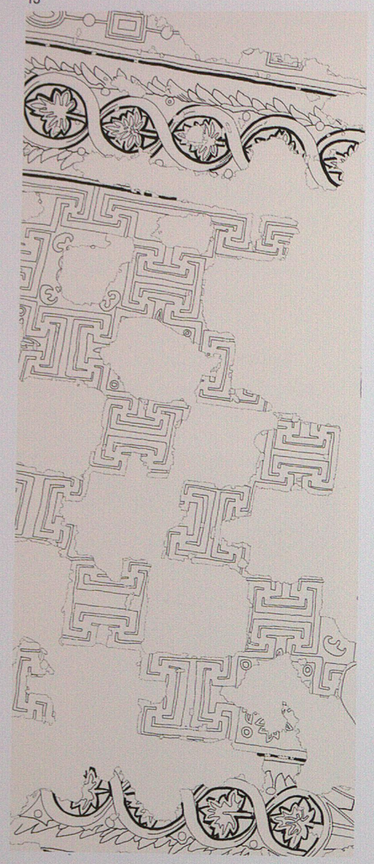
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12



13



hue the lower zone of mosaics in the dome. Mosaic decoration with zones of painted decoration at the springing of the intrados is preserved on six lunettes.[13]

SOUTHEAST LUNETTE: Imbricated meshes with small cruciform palmettes. On the frame, two twisted bands in guilloche.

SOUTH LUNETTE: Traces of small rectangular *pinakes*.

SOUTHWEST LUNETTE: Tangential circles and quatrefoils. On the frame, cruciform chain.

WEST LUNETTE: Meander pattern of crosses with acanthus leaves and rosettes in the interstices. On the frame, floral bands (garlands) and vine leaves.

NORTHWEST LUNETTE: Continuous circles and rectangles with curved sides, with fruits and geometric motifs.

NORTH LUNETTE: Flowers and knots. On the frame, garlands, fleur de lis motifs, branches of pomegranate and pear trees.

Principal traits of the mosaic decoration in the lunettes are the absence of a gold ground and the predominance of geometric and floral motifs. The vegetal ornaments on the frames recall the garlands familiar from Graeco-Roman art. A purple band with gem-studded chain follows the edge of the archivolt of the lunettes and outlines their shape. No discontinuity is observed between the mosaic frame of the lunettes and the mosaic border at the base of the dome. Consequently, it is construed that the mosaics in the lunettes and those of the dome constitute a single ensemble.

13. Mosaic decoration in the west lunette: meander pattern, swastikas, acanthus leaves and rosettes, garlands and vine leaves.

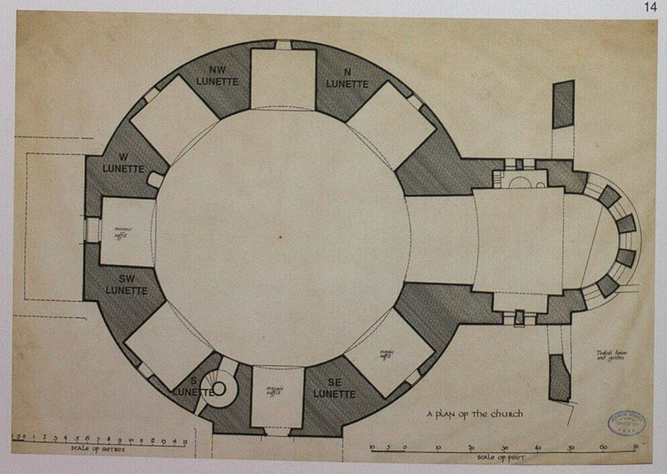
14. Ground plan of the Rotunda (drawing by W.S. George, 1907) with the positions of the illumination slits noted.

15. Mosaic decoration in the north lunette: flowers and knots, bands, lilies, branches of pomegranate and pear trees.

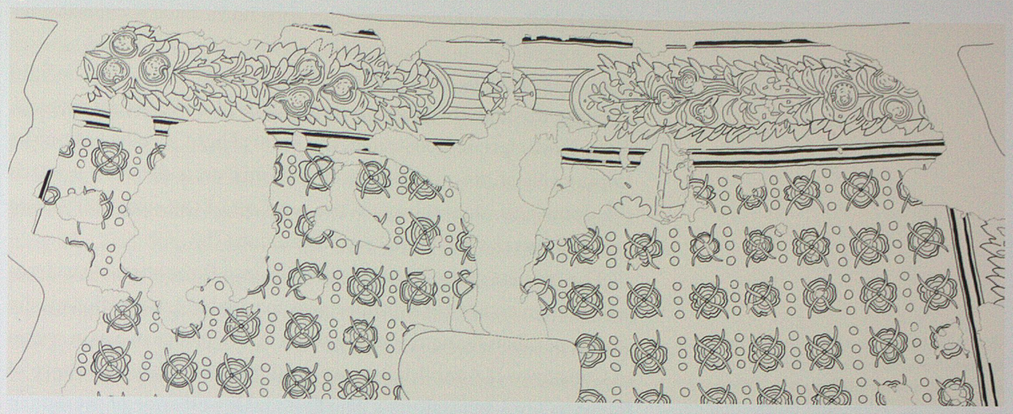
16. Mosaic decoration in the southwest lunette: tangential circles and quatrefoils, chain with cruciform links.

17. Mosaic decoration in the southeast lunette: imbricated meshes with palmettes, imbricated meshes with cruciform palmettes, torsional bands in guilloche.

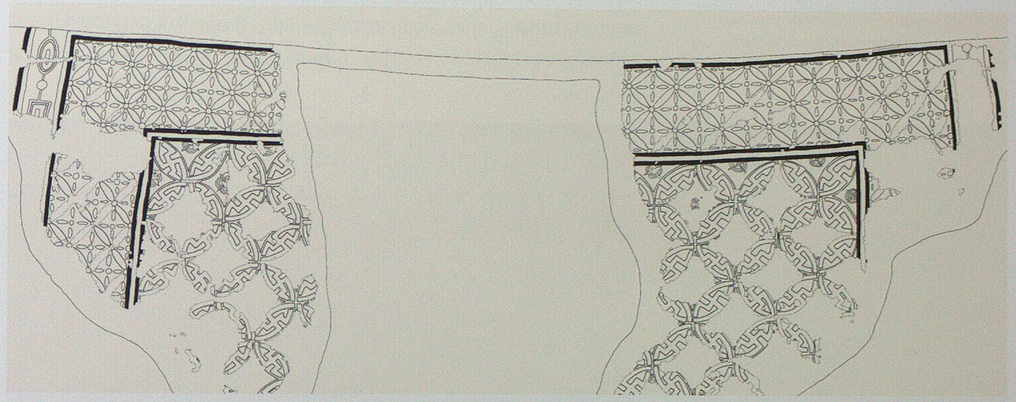
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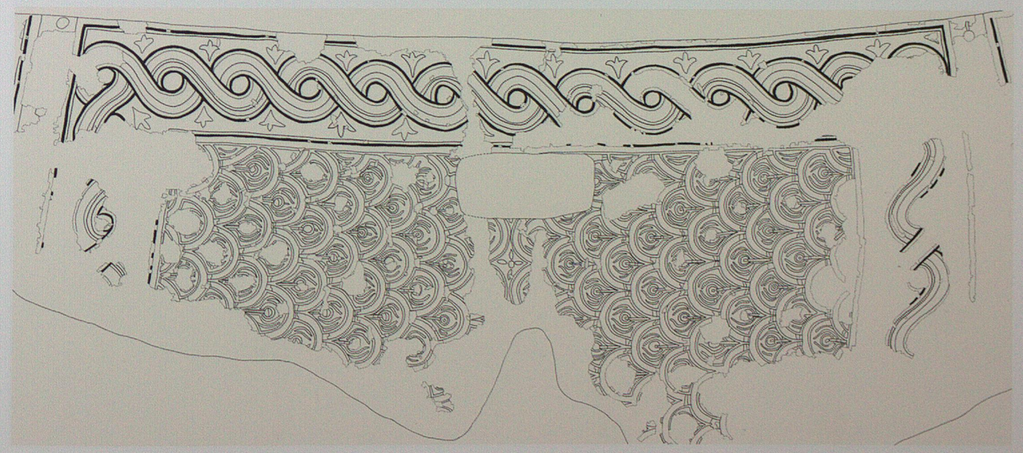
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16



17



THE DOME

It is not only the light from the lunettes but also, primarily, the light entering through the large windows which illuminates the mosaics. As G. Iliadis has demonstrated, the natural light is reflected on the sloping sills of the windows, as if on a mirror, is directed towards the dome and, depending on the position of the sun, illuminates and enlivens the individual representations.[14]

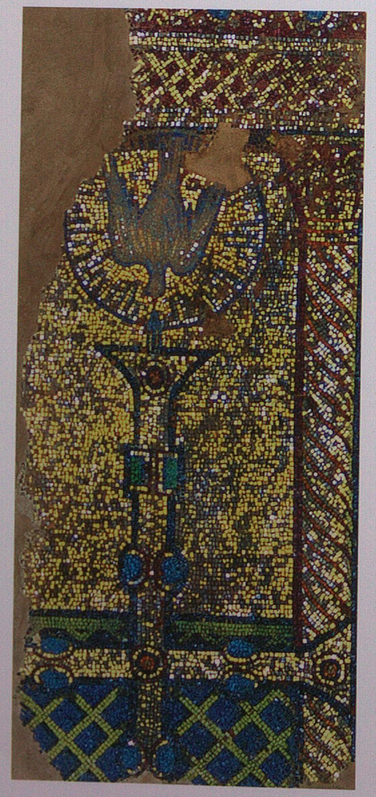
The mosaics in the dome are divided into three successive circular zones, in accordance with the system usual in Late Antiquity, the closest parallels being the mausoleum at Centcelles in Spain, reign of Constance II (mid-4th century) and the Orthodox baptistery in Ravenna (mid-5th century). The first and lowest zone of mosaics in the Rotunda begins with a wide cornice which seems to crown the architectural shapes of the marble dado, depicting decorated mutules or dentils connected to one another by small arcs. Marble

18. In front of a baldachin a gem-studded gold cross. Affixed to the upper arm is a disc-shaped metal emblem with representation of a dove (north panel).

19. Peacock with polychrome plumage beneath a four-pillared pavilion (northwest panel).

20. Part of a semi-dome of a conch decorated with relief and polychrome peacock feathers (south panel).

18



19



monolithic piers adorned with successive acanthus leaves in relief, appear to stand on the cornice and to uphold an entablature decorated with bead-and-reel, mutules, Ionic cymatium and sima with continuous confronted S-motifs. Between them is open space in eight panels of equal size.[15]

Depicted in the panels, in theatrical manner, are scenes that are repeated rhythmically, like a circular procession with no definite beginning and end. Represented in the scenes, in a symmetrical and majestic manner, consistent with Graeco-Roman artistic tradition, are façades of buildings. Built of *spolia* of decorated architectural members that preserve their coloration, they emit a pronounced sense of luxury.

In the middle of these architectural compositions there is always a large conch, apse or opening, in which, as we shall see, something important is kept. Columns, without flutes and twisted, or piers uphold lavishly decorated rectilinear epistyles or marble arches, domed or flat ceilings with coffering and corresponding variety of

20



roofs. To right and left they form balconies that communicate with the central building via passageways, porticoes and colonnades. Ornate and conspicuous stringcourses separate the ground floor from what appears as an upper storey. In the upper storey the tripartite formation of spaces is repeated, with a central building and lateral kiosks. No sidewalls or back walls are visible. Everything is perforated, so that no interior space is created. The golden light enters everywhere and reflects off the façades of the buildings, while the sides of the buildings with their polychrome shadow emphasize the reverse perspective, projecting them in front of the illustrated surface. Nothing is left undecorated. There is an incredible diversity of forms

21. Portico between an apsidal building and a pavilion. A curtain drawn back to admit light (northwest panel).

22. Tetrastyle pavilion with decorated dome. A hanging lamp casts light and shade on the columns. Precious stones reflect the light (south panel).

23. Cornice of an exhedra, assembled from various pieces. Tetrastyle pavilion with coffers, pediment and drawn-back curtain (southeast panel).

21



22



23



24



and everything is opulently adorned with reliefs, inlaid multi-coloured enamels, pearls and precious stones. Heavy vela are half drawn back for light to enter. The pervasive silence becomes more profound in the flickering light of the flames of the lamps hanging from chains and of the candles in the silver candle-stands. Peacocks and other birds with colourful plumage, perched on the cornices and the roofs of the buildings, mutely coexist with marble kraters and monogram crosses, declaring, even when absent –as in the southeast and the northeast panel–, that what we see both exists and does not exist.

THE PANELS OF THE DOME

Four architectural types of buildings are depicted, which are repeated in pairs: either facing (S-N and possibly W-E panels) or complementary (SE-NE and SW-NW panels).

Thanks to the advanced technology of photography, it has been possible to fill in missing parts of one panel on the basis of elements from its like facing or complementary panel. The result is not an actual panel but a virtual panel, which gives a more complete picture of each subject. Such panels are illustrated in figures 35, 53, 57, 58 and 65.

25



26



24. Marble pier with relief acanthus leaves between the north and the northeast panel.

25. Hanging censer illumines a conch with five-lobe opening (southwest panel).

26. Pediment of a building with sphere (north panel).

27. Pediment of a building. Winged Nikai (Victories) hold up a portrait of Constantine the Great with halo (northeast panel).

28. Hanging censer in a conch (northwest panel).

29. Fountain behind a luxurious curtain (west panel).

30. Pendent precious stones reflect and refract the light from a silver hanging lamp (north panel).

27



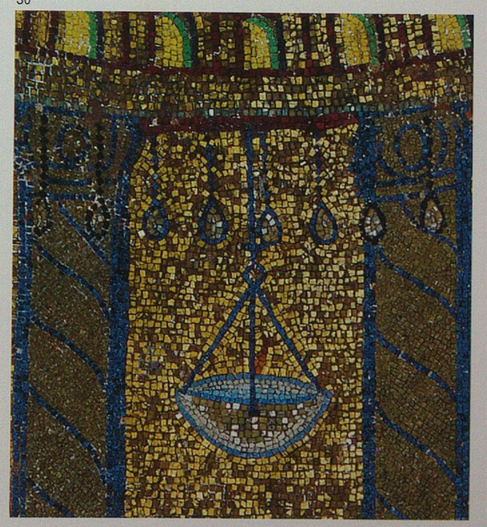
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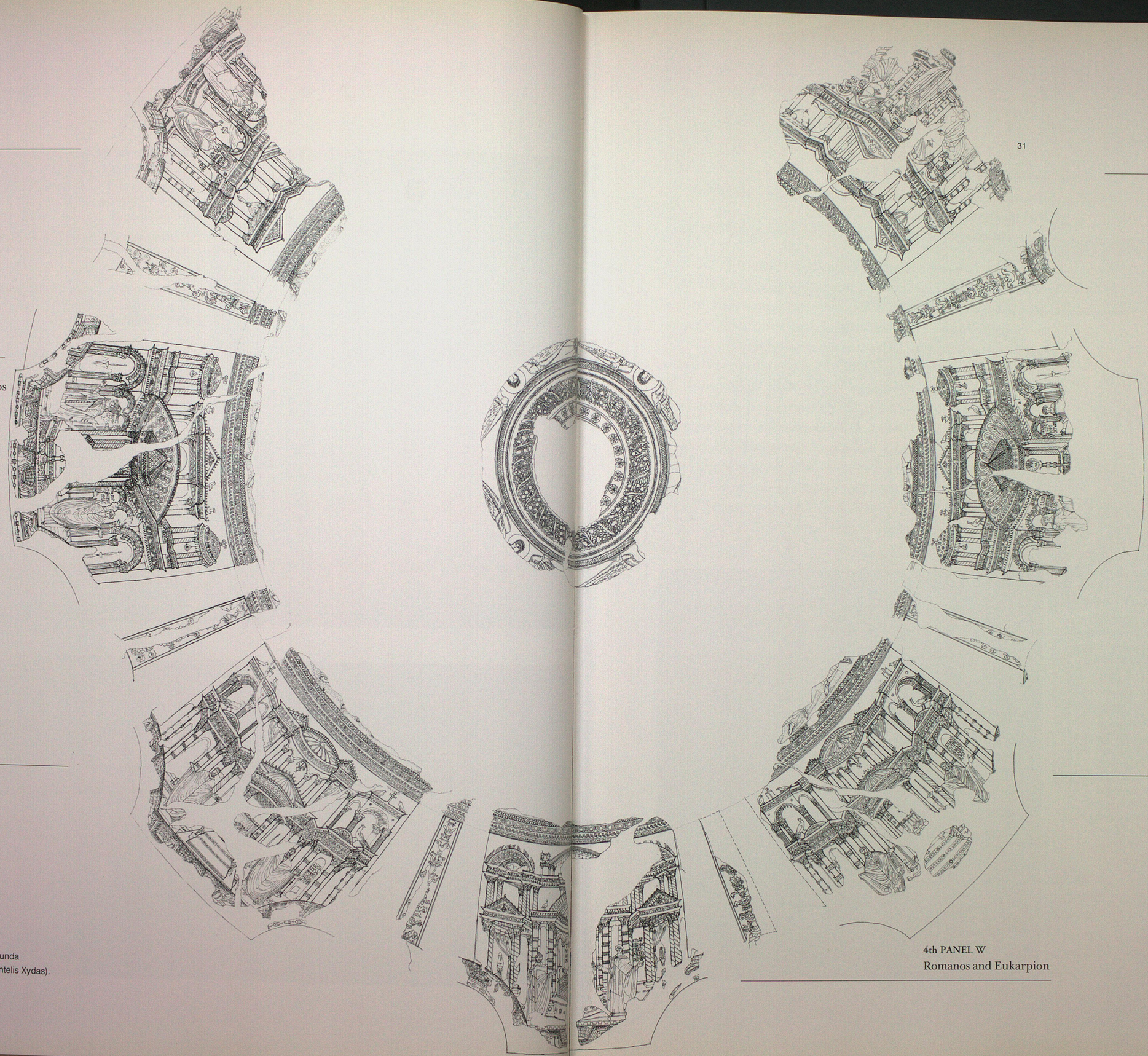
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1st PANEL SE
Leon and Philemon

2nd PANEL S
Onesiphoros and Porphyrios

3rd PANEL SW
Cosmas and Damianos



7th PANEL NE
Philip, Therinos and Cyril

6th PANEL N
Basiliskos and Priskos

5th PANEL NW
A... d..., and Ananias

4th PANEL W
Romanos and Eukarpion

N

31. The mosaics in the dome of the Rotunda
(graphic synthesis and reduction by Pantelis Xydas).

2nd PANEL S: Onesiphoros and Porphyrios.

The inscriptions: a. *Ὀνησι/φόρου / στρ(ατιώτου) μηνὶ / Αὐγ(ούστου)* [of Onesiphoros soldier month of August].
b. *Πορ/φοιρίου / μηνὶ Αὐ/γ(ούστου)* [of Porphyrios month of August].

Below: In the middle conch, relief peacock feathers decorate the semi-dome. Within the conch is a baldachin with a six-sided conical roof and open-work closure slabs in the intercolumniations. In front of the baldachin is a gem-studded gold cross with flaring arms, impacted in a marble base. In front of the cross is a river.

A metal disc-shaped medallion with representation of a dove (Holy Spirit?) is affixed by a pin to the tip of the upper arm of the cross. On either side of the baldachin are four-pillared exhedras with arches and low domes, in which are lighted candles in candle-stands. Above or behind: Octahedral baldachin with conical roof supported on columns. To right and left are four-pillared kiosks with domes, from which hang lamps, the light from which is refracted by gemstones hanging from the epistyle. Birds and vases (kraters) on the parapets and the crowning of the baldachin.

32



32. The soldier Onesiphoros in the service of the king. The invocation 'of Onesiphoros soldier month of August' «Ὀνησιφόρου στρατιώτου μηνὶ Αὐγούστου».

33-34. Drawing and photograph of the south panel: Onesiphoros and Porphyrios pray in front of a conch with baldachin. Between them is a cross on a base and disc-shaped emblem with representation of a dove.

35. Photograph of the south panel completed with elements of the north panel (electronically processed).

36-37. Portraits of two young men, the soldier Onesiphoros and the layman Porphyrios. The vibrant colours, the deep-yellow warm light, the soft roseate shadows, the detailed and charming plasticity, luxuriant hair multi-coloured and tousled all render youthful beauty. The large bright blue eyes of Onesiphoros, the dewy eyes of Porphyrios, the beardless and round faces express introversion, dignity and piety.

33











6th PANEL N: Basiliskos and Priskos.

The inscriptions: a. *Βασιλί/σκου στρα(τιώτου) / μηνὶ Ἀπρι/λίου*
[of Basiliskos soldier month of April].
b. *Πρίσκου / στρα(τιώτου) / μηνὶ / Ὀκτωβρί(ου)*
[of Priskos soldier month of October].

The subject of the north panel is the same as that of the south one (p. 66), with minor differences. For example, the relief and polychrome peacock feathers decorating the semi-dome of the conch are depicted in the north panel from one side and in the south panel from the other. The soldiers Basiliskos and Priskos pray in front of a conch with baldachin and between them is a gem-studded cross. Affixed to its upper arm is a metal disc-shaped emblem with representation of a dove. The cornice is decorated with confronted swans. Above or behind: Octahedral pavilion and four-columned pavilions. On the cornices and the roofs are birds and kraters.

38



38. The soldier Basiliskos in the service of the king. The invocation 'of Basiliskos soldier month of April' «Βασιλίσκου στρατιώτου μηνὶ Ἀπριλίου».

39-40. Drawing and photograph of the north panel (see also fig. 35).

41-42. Portraits of two young men, the soldiers Basiliskos and Priskos. The vibrant warm colours of the tesserae, the gentle shadows, the detailed and charming plasticity, the large astonished eyes, the tousled red hair of Basiliskos, the innocent eyes, the well-combed hair of Priskos, their beardless and round faces render youthful beauty and express introversion, dignity and piety.

39









4th PANEL W: Romanos and Eukarpion.
8th PANEL E: Destroyed.

The inscriptions: WEST PANEL: a. Unidentifiable figure. The inscription with his name and status has been removed.
b. *Ρωμα/νοῦ / πρεσϐ(υτέρου)* [of Romanos presbyter]. Destroyed figure. The right arm preserved.
c. *Εὐκαρ/πίωνος / στρατ(ιώτου) / μηνὶ Δε/κεμϐρ(ίου)* [of Eukarpion soldier month of December].

Below: In the middle is a conch with shell in the semi-dome. Inside the conch is a low, six-sided parclose of open-work closure slabs (templon-screen of a holy bema?). In front of the parclose, Romanos the presbyter in prayer.[16] Behind, in the narrow arched openings are candles and hanging lamps. On either side of the conch are four-pillared exhedras with arch and pitched roof. Inside the exhedras are fountains and in the openings are drawn-back vela.
Above or behind: Visible in the middle is a pedimented roof beneath a triumphal arch decorated with gems that sparkle in the golden light. To right and left, six-pillared kiosks with flat ceilings and an open-ended vault as roof. Birds and vases (kraters) on the cornices and the roof of the central conch.

43



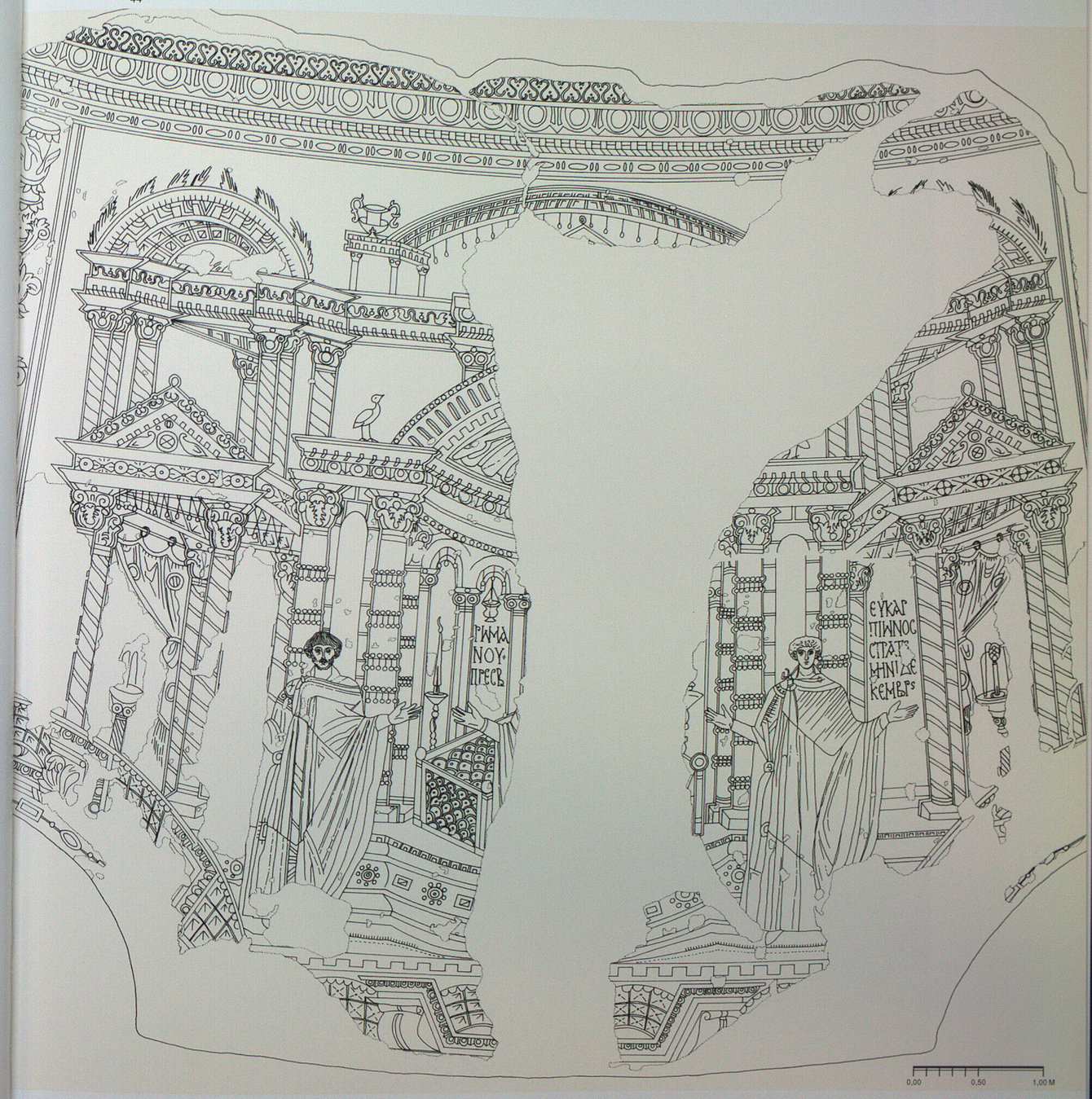
43. Six-columned pavilion with flat coffered ceiling roofed by a barrel vault. Epistyle decorated with heraldic swans. Behind are hanging gardens.

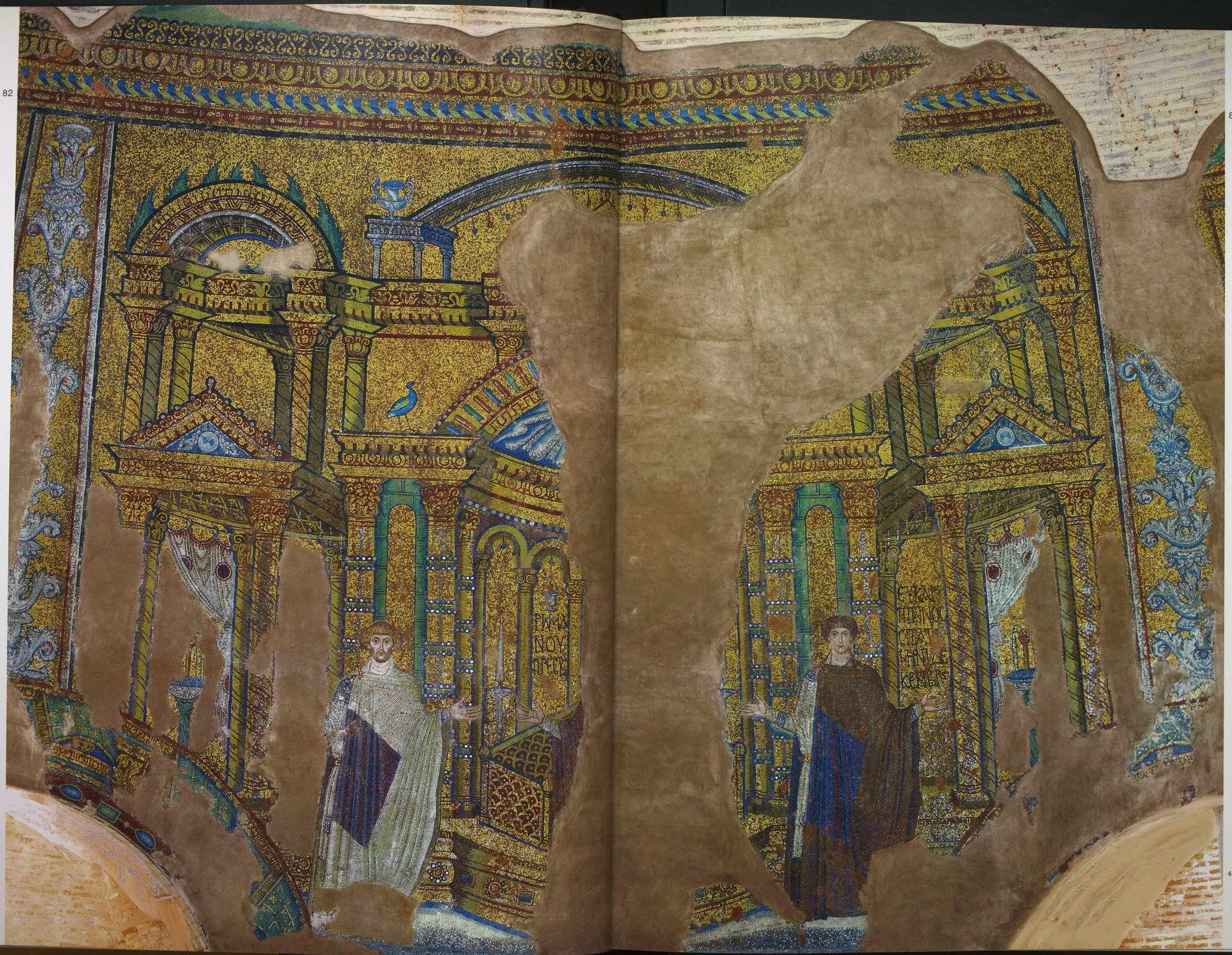
44-45. Drawing and photograph of the west panel. The presbyter Romanos (his figure has been destroyed by a large crack) prays in front of a marble parclose between two soldiers, Eukarpion right and an unidentified figure left, as the inscription with his name has been removed.

46-47. Unidentified soldier. He wears formal uniform, a long tunic and a white chlamys fastened with a fibula on the shoulder and on the chest the clavus, a sewn band of cloth of different colour denoting his rank. The multi-coloured carefully combed unruly hair, the large eyes staring directly at the viewer, the masculine nose, the neatly trimmed beard express introversion, dignity and piety.

48-49. The soldier Eukarpion with lilac chlamys. The invocation 'of Eukarpion soldier month of December' «Εὐκαρπίωνος στρατιώτου μηνὶ Δεκεμβρίου». The gentle roseate shadows, the detailed and charming plasticity of the beardless face, the thick hair, the musing eyes, the firmly closed lips express introversion, dignity and piety.

44





84



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85



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86



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87



49

50-51. Portraits of the soldier Leon and the *choraulos* (master of ceremonies) Philemon. The sophistication of the hairstyle, the look of surprise in the eyes, the beardless face of Leon and the simple untidy hair, the methodical gaze, the short beard of the *choraulos* Philemon, together with the variety in the succession of colours and the differentiation in the intensity of the shadows accurately render the youth and its prime characteristic of the two figures.

52. Drawing of the southeast panel.

53. Photograph of the southeast panel completed graphically with elements of the northeast panel. Most probably a young man of corresponding status to the *choraulos* was depicted in the destroyed left part. Two winged figures uplifting a male figure with halo were depicted on the pediment, in correspondence to the northeast panel.

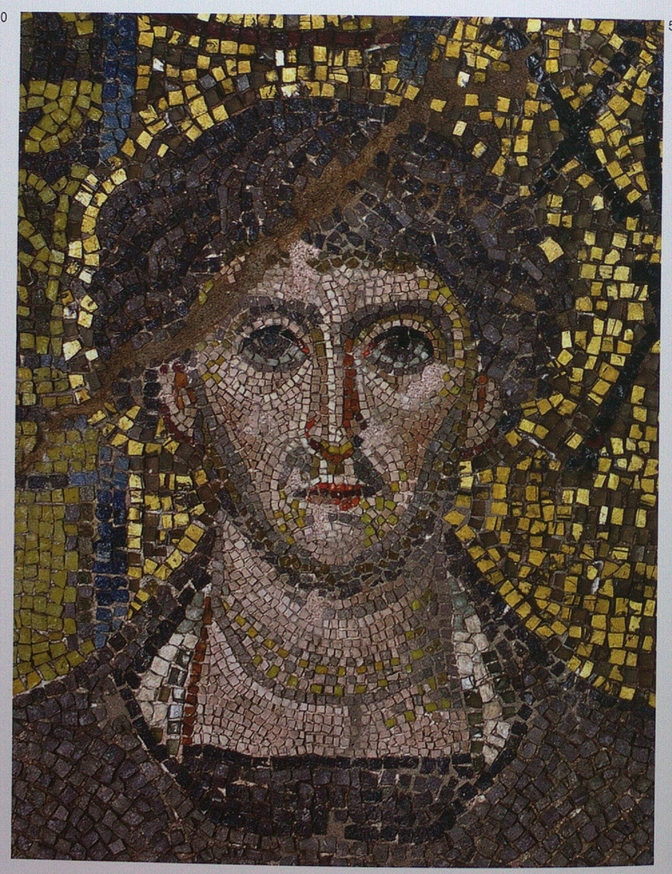
1st PANEL SE: Destroyed figure, Leon and Philemon.

The inscriptions: a. Figure and inscription destroyed. b. *Λέοντος / στρατ(ιώτου) / μηνὶ / Ἰουν(ίου)* [of Leon soldier month of June]. c. *Φηλή/μονος / χοραύ/λου / μηνὶ / Μαρ/τ(ίου)* [of Philemon *choraulos* month of March].

Preserved is part of the central and the right area of the panel.
Below: In the middle is a temple-shaped building (aedicule) with pediment, inside which are traces of a winged figure. Hanging in the central entrance to the aedicule is a jewelled crown. An arched opening with velum drawn aside leads into a corridor lit by hanging lamps and to a six-pillared exhedra with coffering.
Above or behind: In the middle is a circular baldachin with dome. To right and left are four-pillared kiosks with coffered ceiling and pediments. Tied vela in the kiosks.



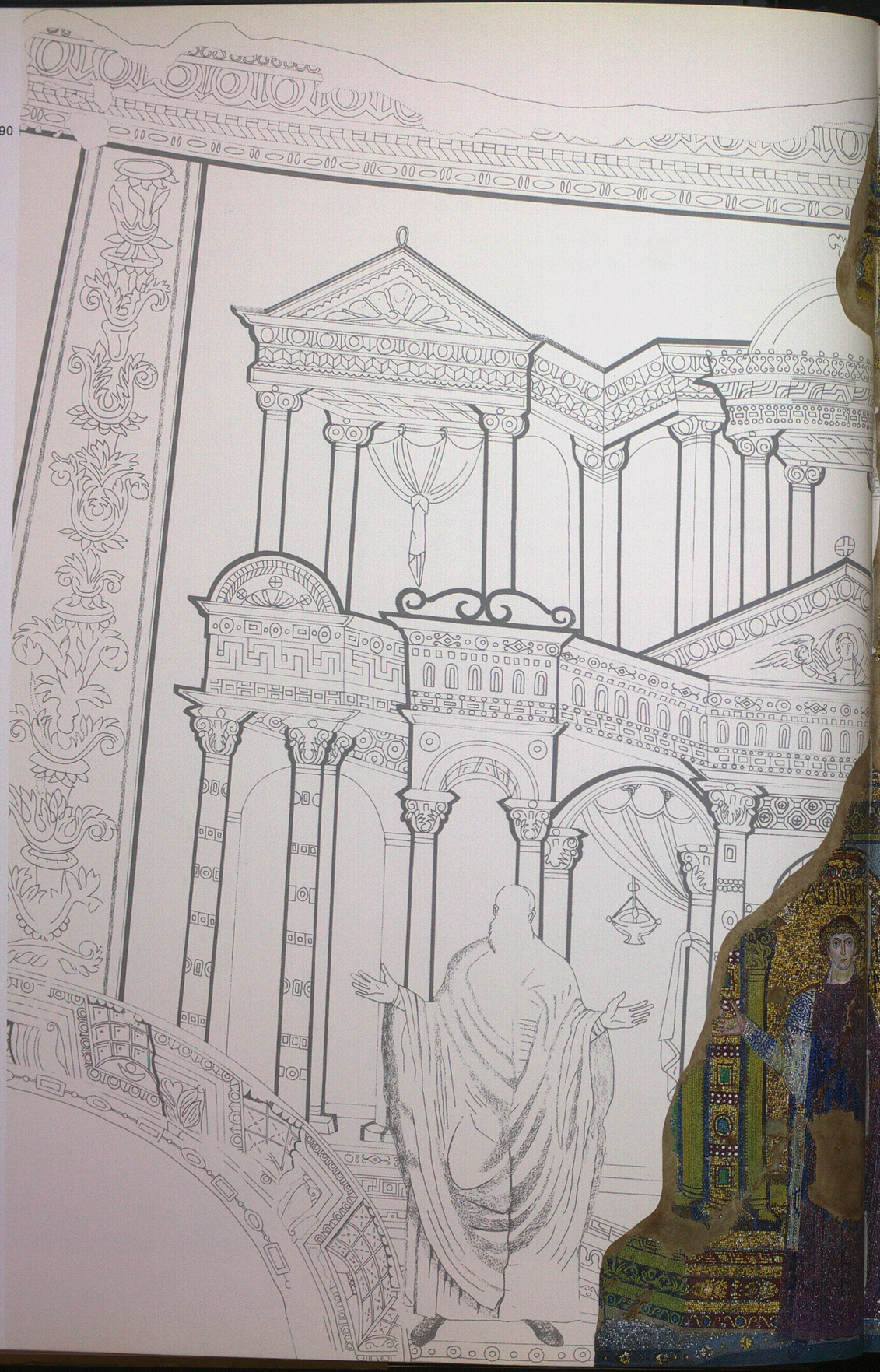
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51



52





54-55. Portraits of two elderly bishops, Philip and Cyril. The phailonia do not convey the volume of the body beneath. On the faces, which have lost their brightness, the blue tesserae, the grey or turquoise on the eyebrows and the long beards, the broad shadows render convincingly the knowledge of acquired wisdom, which distinguishes the figures.

56-57. Drawing and photograph (completed graphically) of the northeast panel. Principal subjects are the depiction of the emperor on the pediment, the crown and the high-ranking army officer Therinos with cloth-of-gold chlamys, flanked by two elderly bishops.

58. Photograph of the northeast panel completed with elements of the southeast panel (electronically processed).

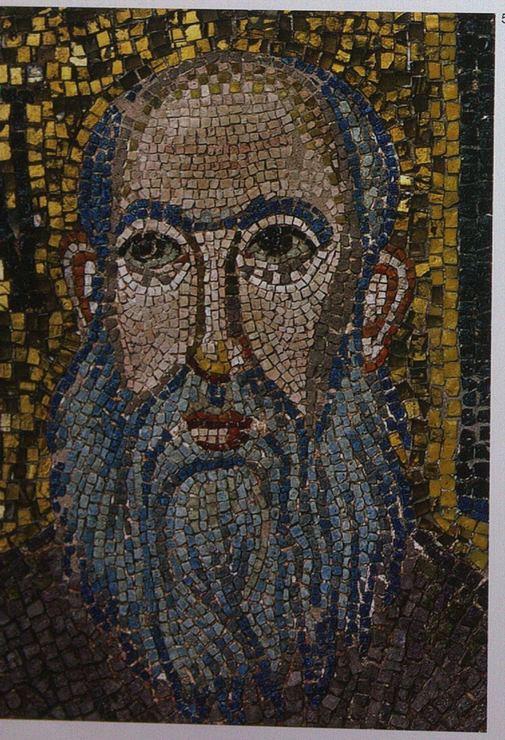
59-60. The soldier Therinos. The invocation 'of Therinos soldier month of July' «Θερινοῦ στρατιώτου μηνὶ Ἰουλίου». Vivid colours, angular face with pronounced cheekbones, dishevelled hair, valour in the eyes express the impetuousness of youth in its prime.

7th PANEL NE: Philip, Therinos and Cyril.

The inscriptions: a. *Φιλίπ/που ἐπι/σκ(όπου) μη/νὶ Ὀκτω/βρ(ίου)*
[of Philip bishop month of October].
b. *Θερινοῦ / στρατ(ιώτου) / μηνὶ Ἰου/λ(ίου)*
[of Therinos soldier month of July].
c. *Κυρίλ/[λ]ου ἐπι/σκ(όπου) μην[ὶ] / Ἰουλ(ίου)*
[of Cyril bishop month of July].

The subject of the northeast panel is the same as that of the southeast one (p. 88), with minor differences.
Below: In the middle a temple-shaped building with pediment on which are represented two relief winged Nikai (Victories) carrying a portrait of a haloed emperor. In the central entrance of the building and above the soldier Therinos hangs a gem-studded crown. To right and left, drawn-back curtains permit entry into corridors lit by hanging lamps and leading to hexastyle exhedras with coffering. In front of the corridors are the bishops Philip and Cyril.
Above or behind: In the middle is a circular baldachin with dome. To right and left are four-columned pavilions with coffered ceilings and pediments. On the pavilions are vela tied in a knot.

54



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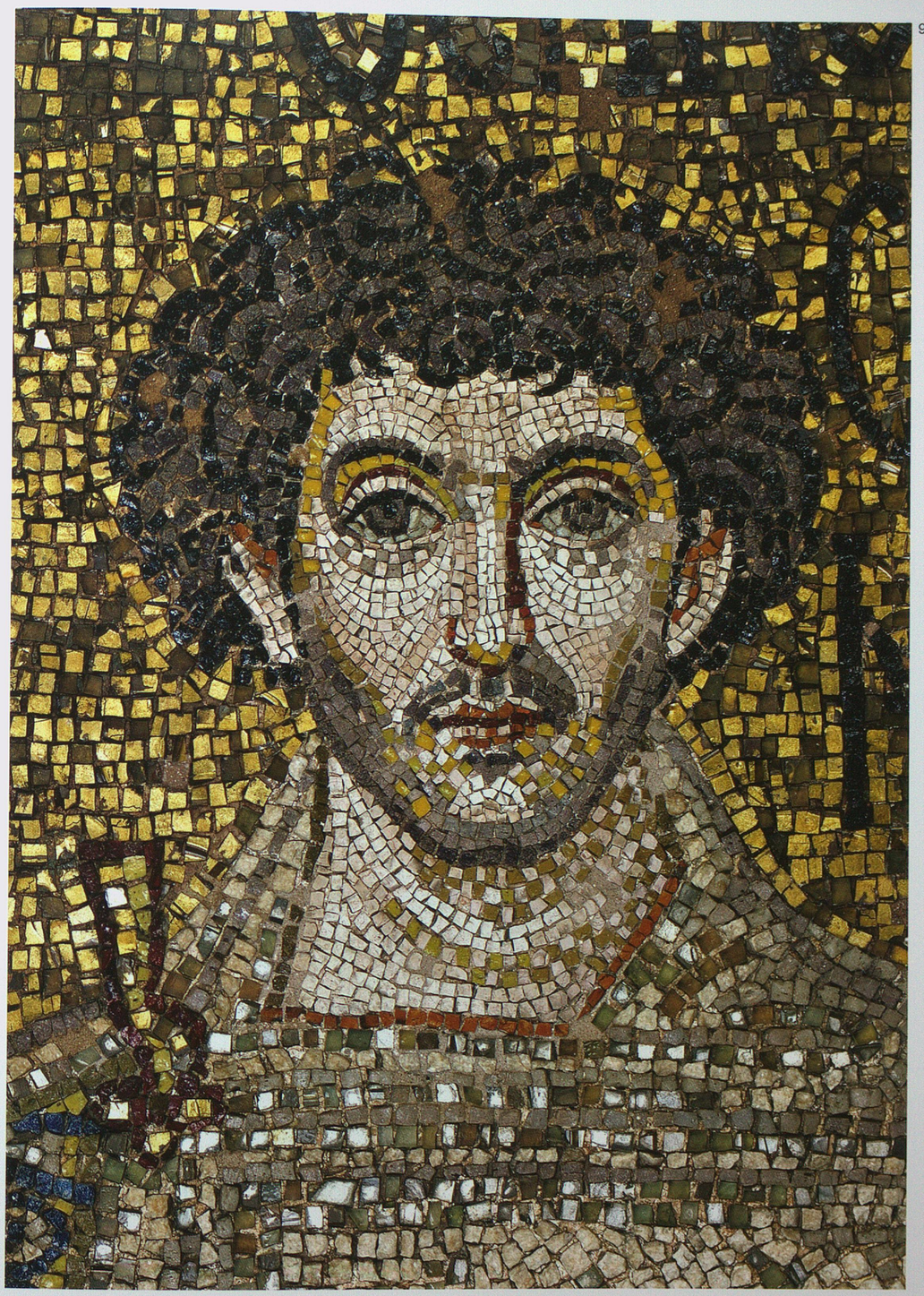


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61-62. Portraits of the physicians Cosmas and Damianos. Cosmas wears a greyish white phailonion with lilac hues, Damianos a phailonion with greenish yellow shadows. The faces are less white, the shadows stronger, the beards short, brown, black and grey short hair, wide-open penetrating eyes reflect the sense of justice that comes with middle age.

63-64. Drawing and photograph of the southwest panel: The inscription with the name and status of the male figure on the left has been removed. Preserved is the first letter of his name K[...], from which 'Cosmas physician' (Κοσμᾶ ἰατροῦ) can be restored. Principal subject is the depiction of a sealed book of Law, placed on a stool between two middle-aged physicians. Monogram crosses and birds on the roofs of the pavilions.

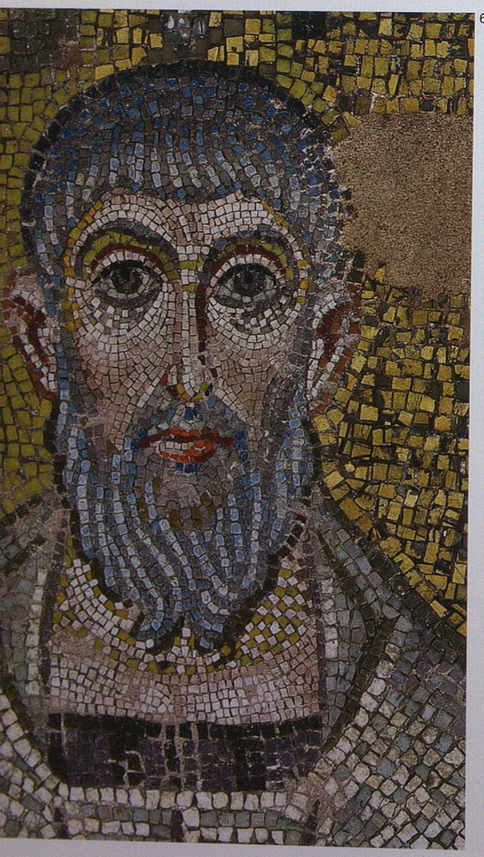
65. Photograph of the southwest panel completed with elements of the northwest panel (electronically processed).

3rd PANEL SW: Cosmas and Damianos.

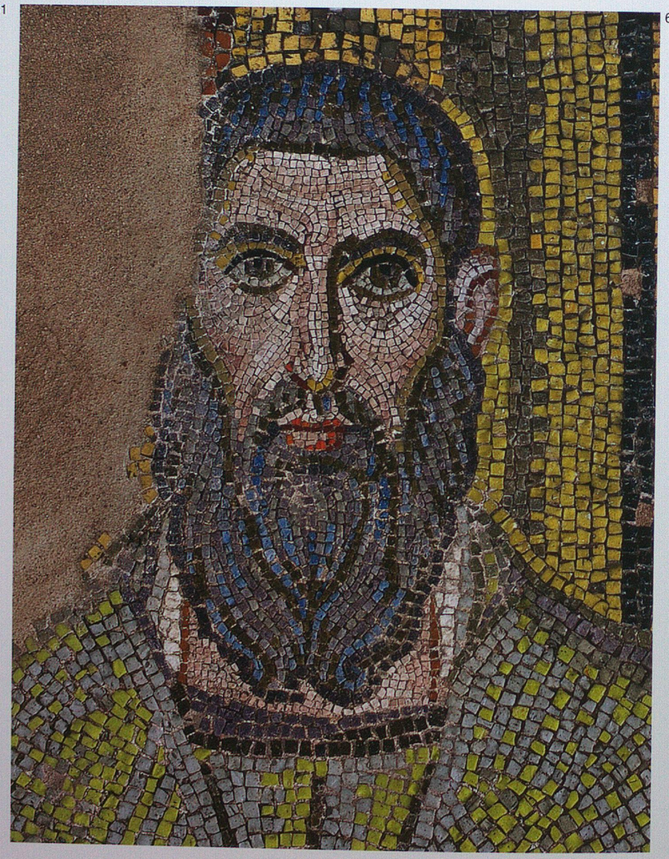
The inscriptions: a. *K[οσμᾶ …]* [of Cosmas …].
b. *Δαμια/νοῦ ἰα/τροῦ μη/νὶ Σε/πτεμ(βρίου)*
[of Damianos physician month of September].

Below: In the middle is a circular baldachin with dome. On a three-stepped pedestal a *scimpodium* with gem-studded Law book (Gospel?) closed and sealed.[17] At the back is a green podea. To right and left of the baldachin are candle-stands with lighted candles. At the edges are doorways with monumental propyla.
Above or behind: Conch with five-lobe opening and shell in the semi-vault. To right and left openings with vela and pedimented or conical roof. At the edges are four-pillared kiosks with arches and flat roof. Peacocks on the crowning of the one-storey building, various birds with monogram crosses between them on the roofs of the kiosks.

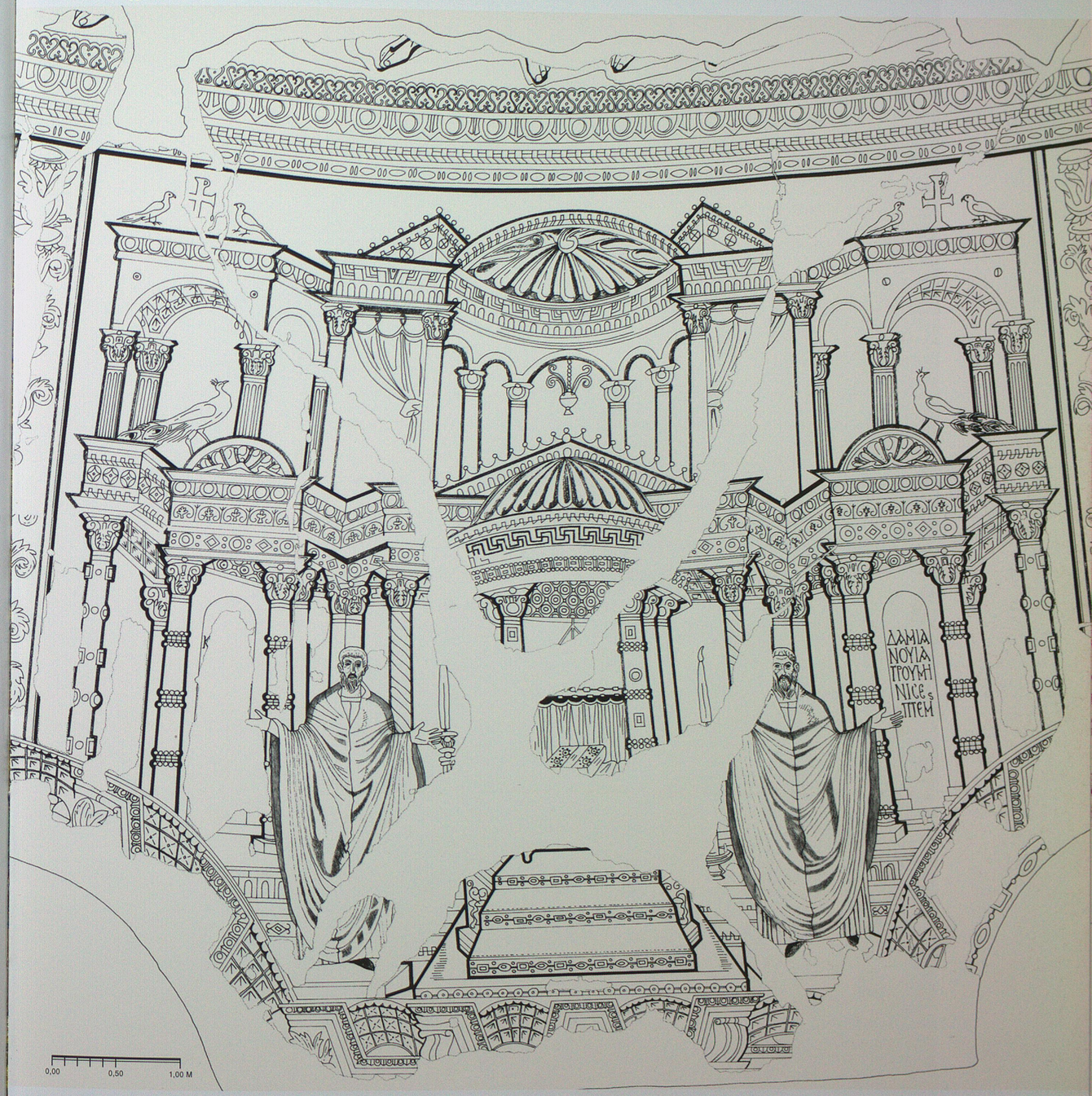
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66-67. Portraits of A[...] δ [...] (the inscription with the name and status of the male figure has been removed) and the presbyter Ananias. The short dark hair does not shadow the face, the large wide-open highly introspective eyes, the pursed lips with the pointed beard of A[...] δ [...] and the well-intentioned lips with short beard of Ananias render the diffuse spirituality and piety of the figures.

68-69. Drawing and photograph of the northwest panel. Principal subject is the sealed book of Law (Gospel-book?) placed on a stool between a presbyter and an unidentified male figure. The monogram crosses on the roofs of the pavilions, between birds, are in the process of being established as Christian symbols.

5th PANEL NW: A... d..., and Ananias

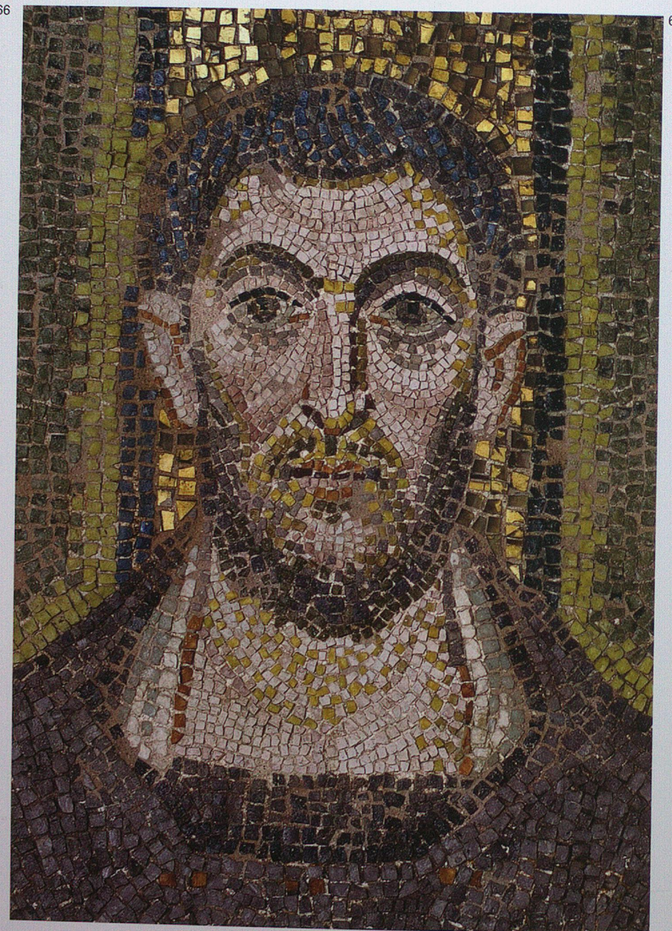
The inscriptions: a. *A[…] δ[…].*
b. *Ἀνανί/ου πρεσ/β(υτέρου) μηνὶ / Ἰανου/αρί(ου).*
[of Ananias presbyter month of January].

The subject of the northwest panel is the same as that of the southwest one (p. 100), with minor differences.
Below: Two middle-aged men, the one on the right a presbyter, on either side of a sealed book of Law (Gospel-book?) placed on a stool inside a baldachin.
Above or behind: A conch, pediments and four-columned pavilions. The roofs of the pavilions are decorated with monogram crosses and birds.

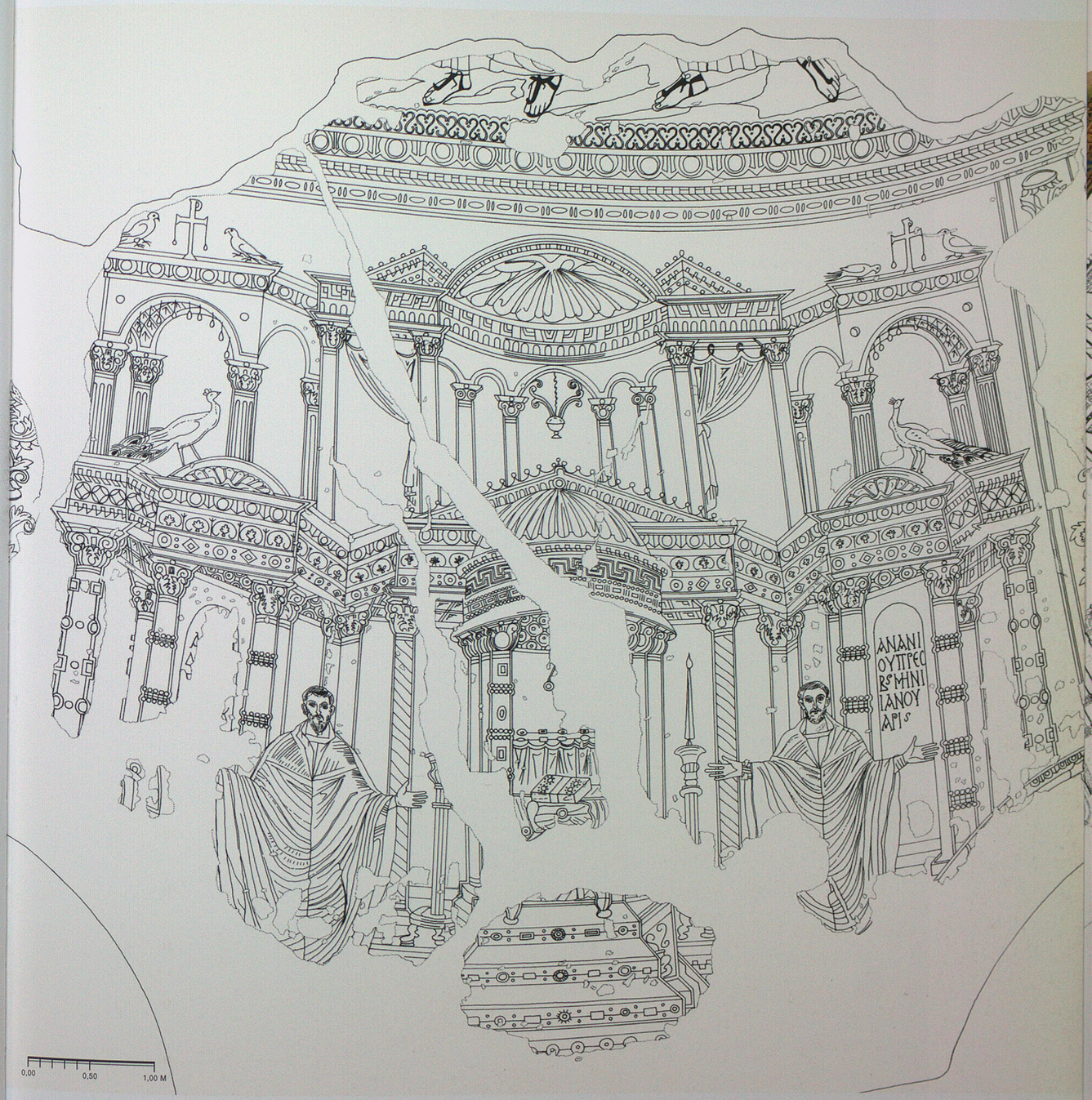
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70. Drawing of the west part of the lower zone of mosaics with four panels (south, southwest, west, northwest). The panels are separated by bands rendering marble piers with relief decoration of acanthus leaves and upholding a cornice richly ornamented with superimposed registers of sima, Ionic cymatium, dentils and bead-and-reel. From behind the buildings in the lower zone of mosaics and above the cornice emerges a scene that was the middle zone of mosaics and which has been almost entirely removed. Preserved are parts of its lower area: depicted on the grassy ground are sandaled feet and in some cases the hemline of a white himation of a total of 36 male figures in lively dance (?) movement (drawing by Pantelis Xydas).

The prevailing opinion is that the scenes in the panels illustrate Heavenly Jerusalem.[18] According to another viewpoint, actual buildings are depicted.[19] Of course, two-storey buildings with tripartite division are usual in the architecture of Roman times, with roots in the Hellenistic world. Rock-cut monumental tombs in Arabia Petraia display many similarities. Public buildings have the same form, such as the Library of Ephesus and buildings in the agora of Miletus or the *scaenae frons* of Hellenistic and Roman theatres. Buildings of like form are depicted frequently in wall-paintings of Pompeii and Rome.[20]

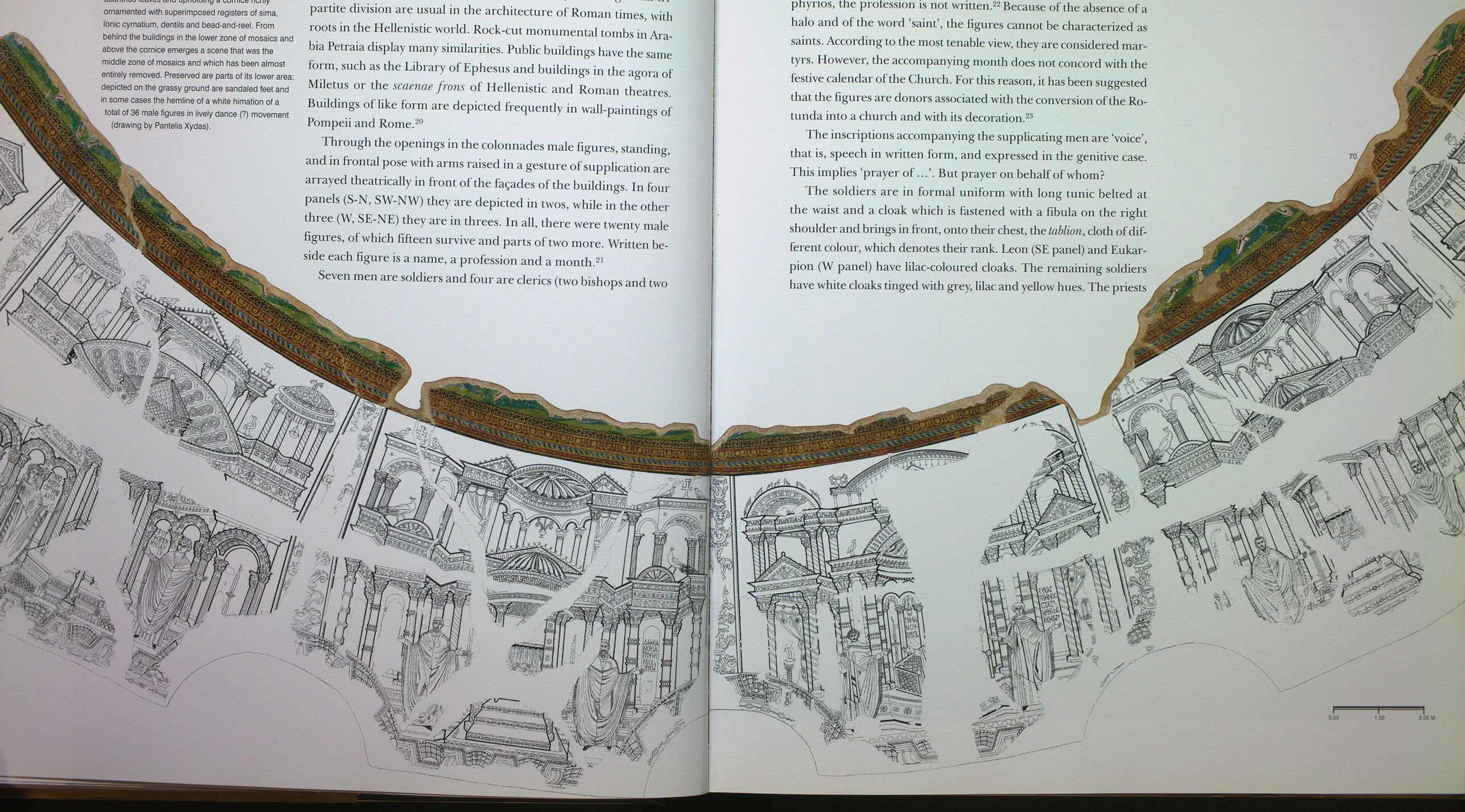
Through the openings in the colonnades male figures, standing, and in frontal pose with arms raised in a gesture of supplication are arrayed theatrically in front of the façades of the buildings. In four panels (S-N, SW-NW) they are depicted in twos, while in the other three (W, SE-NE) they are in threes. In all, there were twenty male figures, of which fifteen survive and parts of two more. Written beside each figure is a name, a profession and a month.[21]

Seven men are soldiers and four are clerics (two bishops and two

presbyters), one man is a physician (possibly two), one a *choraulos* (a flute-player who accompanies a chorus) and in one case, of Porphyrios, the profession is not written.[22] Because of the absence of a halo and of the word 'saint', the figures cannot be characterized as saints. According to the most tenable view, they are considered martyrs. However, the accompanying month does not concord with the festive calendar of the Church. For this reason, it has been suggested that the figures are donors associated with the conversion of the Rotunda into a church and with its decoration.[23]

The inscriptions accompanying the supplicating men are 'voice', that is, speech in written form, and expressed in the genitive case. This implies 'prayer of …'. But prayer on behalf of whom?

The soldiers are in formal uniform with long tunic belted at the waist and a cloak which is fastened with a fibula on the right shoulder and brings in front, onto their chest, the *tablion*, cloth of different colour, which denotes their rank. Leon (SE panel) and Eukarpion (W panel) have lilac-coloured cloaks. The remaining soldiers have white cloaks tinged with grey, lilac and yellow hues. The priests



71. Cornice with bead-and-reel, dentils, Ionic cymatium and sima, and part of the representation in the middle zone of mosaics with feet of male figures in motion. The synchronized movement, the turn and the direction of the figures can be clearly seen.

72. The mosaics in the central medallion. Four winged Nikai/angels with haloes uphold the sphere of the Cosmos: behind a floating casing woven with bright green leaves of trees and juicy fruits projects the polychrome rainbow and the star-spangled blue sky. The representation at the centre has been removed. However, small parts of it and the preliminary drawing on the surface of the masonry survive: Advancing within silvery light is an upright male figure with halo and fluttering long chiton, who raises his right hand and holds a staff. The figure is the same as in representations of the *adventus* of the emperor and is influenced by Late Antique depictions of the Sun-god Helios *(Sol invictus)*. We argue that this is a triumphal arrival of Constantine the Great. Depicted outside the sphere of the Cosmos are a phoenix and rays of light.

and the other civilians wear an ankle-length chiton and a phailonion. The unidentifiable figure (NW panel) and Cosmas (SW panel) are garbed in greyish white phailonia with lilac shades. The phailonion of the physician Damianos (SW panel) has greenish yellow shadows. The rest of the figures are attired in purple-mauve phailonia with folds and shadows in gradations of the same colour. The rich drapery of the garments masks the volume of the body. Contrastingly, there is marked plasticity in the rendering of the particular physiognomy and spirituality of the faces, with the distinctive hairstyle of each and the large eyes that gaze ecstatically at the world.[24]

Notwithstanding the differences in style and skill of the artists, all the male figures emanate dignity.[25] The faces are modelled and coloured by the coherent sequence of the tesserae. The density of the lines, the succession of colours and the intensity of the shadowing reflect the age of each figure.[26] Common traits in the portraits of Leon, Onesiphoros, Porphyrios, Priskos and Therinos are the vivid colours, the detailed, soft, charming plasticity of youthful comeliness. In the portraits of Cosmas, Damianos and Ananias, lines of finer tesserae vividly model the sense of justice characteristic of middle age. In the portrait of the elderly bishop Philip, the grey of the eyebrows and the beard, highlighted by light-blue tesserae, conveys with large tesserae and broad shadows knowledge and wisdom.

If the representation of the praying men is imbued with deep silence, behind the wide cornice that defined this zone of mosaics a

71





72

scene of totally different content and character emerged, at least as far as can be understood from the very few parts of it that have survived. This scene filled the middle zone of mosaics and is almost completely destroyed. Only parts of its lower part are preserved: visible on a grassy ground are men's feet with sandals and in some cases the hem of a white himation. It is estimated that there were initially thirty-six male figures, which, judging by the pose of the feet on the ground, were represented in lively dance movement, surely related to the fluttering in golden light of four flying winged figures. Were the figures prophets or saints? M. Soteriou proposed that this was a swarm of white-clad angels in random poses of glorification.[27]

Whereas the male figures move in the world here (green ground), they attend something that takes place in the world there (golden light). The two spaces will have been separated at a certain height by the dividing line of the horizon.

The four winged figures are not axially placed in relation to the panels of the first zone of mosaics or to the ground-floor conches. They move freely, holding up the globe in the apex of the dome: behind a suspended canopy woven from verdant leaves of trees and multicoloured juicy fruits of all seasons, so as to ripen continually, rainbow colours and stars stand out in a blue sky. In the middle, the azure light changes into silver and a standing beardless figure with halo appears, dressed in a long billowing chiton, with the right leg slightly to the fore and the right hand raised, while the left holds a staff. All that remains of this figure are the fingers of the right hand, the splayed tip of the staff and a small part of the halo.

The rest has been filled in on the basis of the preliminary drawing preserved on the surface of the masonry.[28] This figure is identified as Christ and the scene as his triumphal arrival at the Second Coming or Last Judgement.[29] Iconographically, however, it is little different from representations of the *adventus* of an emperor and is influenced by depictions of the Sun-god Helios in Late Antiquity.[30]

Of the four figures upholding the spherical composition of the Apotheosis and flutter in the golden light, only three faces with serious expression, the hands and part of their large wings survive. Outside this world of this triumphal *adventus*, the phoenix is depicted on the east side between two winged figures. The mythical bird's head is projected against a bright red disc, from the centre of which radiate beams of light. The phoenix turns to the North and sees something that has not survived, perhaps a cross, in effulgent light.

DATING

It is generally accepted that the Rotunda was founded by Galerius as part of a palace complex. It is also generally accepted that the Rotunda was decorated with mural mosaics when it was converted into a church. The date of the conversion for Christian worship is placed between the late fourth and the sixth century.[31] Recently, Sl. Ćurčić has argued persuasively that the Rotunda was founded by Constantine the Great, as his mausoleum, most probably in 322-323, on the occasion of Thessaloniki's establishment as new capital, and that it was decorated with mosaics by Theodosius I, in the late fourth century, when it became a church.[32]

In their recent examination of the arguments on which this correlation is based, Ch. Bakirtzis and P. Mastora have ascertained that: (a) the constructional interventions to turn the Rotunda into a church concern parts of the monument to which the mosaic decoration does not extend, and (b) the mosaic representations and the individual iconographic subjects do not have an exclusively Christian interpretation, but are linked with the imperial iconography of Late Antiquity.[33]

On examining the mosaics at close quarters, during the recent works on their conservation, the two scholars observed that the placement of tesserae in the dome began from the apex and continued downwards to the base, following an incised and painted preliminary design.[34] They expressed the view that differences between iconographic subjects repeated in different panels are not related to qualitative artistic differentiations but to the juxtaposition of two worlds that coexist in the same work: of a world that is waning with the perfection of autarky, and of a world that is waxing and perceives the same things differently.

They suggested that in terms of style, the polychromy links the faces of the orant figures with faces in the wall-paintings of Macedonian tombs, and their ethos with faces in tombs of the Constantinian period from the Thessaloniki cemetery. The similarity of the winged figures to persons of the Constantinian imperial élite of Trier and the portraits of Constantine the Great is striking, while comparison with the wall-paintings in the mausoleum at Centcelles in Spain, of the reign of Constance II in the mid-fourth century, attests to the early date of the Rotunda mosaics.[35]

These correlations and the coexistence –acknowledged by all researchers– of iconographic elements of Late Antique imperial art and Early Christian art would permit the dating of the mosaics in the dome and the lunettes of the Rotunda to the reign of Constantine the Great. They are the unsurpassable work of a team of mosaicists under the dir-

ection of an ingenious artist, who undertook to give material form to the idea of the composition. An original masterly composition without parallel in the artistic creation of the early fourth century, in which the maturity of Late Antiquity and the vehemence of Christianity converge, these mosaics exerted an enormous influence on the subsequent formation of Christian iconography.

The remarkably beautiful figures in the lower zone of mosaics are not saints or martyrs but portraits of specific persons in the Constantinian élite, which was enhanced after Constantine the Great's reforms. Depicted in the middle zone are 36 figures in a doxastic dance. Illustrated at the centre of the dome was the triumphal *adventus* of Constantine the Great, with the support of his tutelary deity Helios (phoenix) and the revealed Christ (cross), inside the sphere of the Cosmos, upheld by winged Nikai/angels.

According to Ch. Bakirtzis and P. Mastora, the Rotunda could be the third mausoleum of Constantine the Great. The emperor founded two mausolea, in Rome and in Constantinople.

The Rotunda of Thessaloniki, as mausoleum of Constantine the Great, records in its architectural form and superlative mosaic decoration not only the idiosyncratic character and the historical role of this man, but also the convergence of the two worlds that set their seal on the history of mankind.

73. The radiant head of the phoenix is projected against the red disc of the halo. It attests the presence of the Sun-god Helios (*Sol invictus*).

74. Head of a Nike/angel holding seriously and strongly the sphere of the Cosmos.

75. Part of the representation in the central medallion. A winged Nike/angel with halo bears in the hands the sphere of the Cosmos: colours of the rainbow, leafy branches and fruits of the heavenly garden, and stars brighter even than the blue sky of day.

73



NOTES

1 Vitti 1996, 105-108 and 227-228.
2 Makaronas 1969. Laubscher 1975.
3 Hébrard 1920, 26-36. Ćurčić 2010, 218-224.
4 Theocharidis 1954, 44-48. In recent times the Rotunda was dedicated to St George.
5 Bakalopoulos 1955-1960.
6 Dimitriadis 1983, 295.
7 Hébrard 1920, 18-26. Dyggve 1941, 64-66.
8 Originally eight, on the axis of the piers. The two east lunettes were later replaced by three.
9 Hébrard 1920, 26-28. Dyggve 1953, 65-68. Moutsopoulos 1984.
10 Xyngopoulos 1938. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1986, 399-403.
11 Theocharidou 1991-1992, 67-68, drawings 13 and 15.
12 Spieser 1984, 132-164. Pazaras 1985, 29-40.
13 Mastora 2010.
14 Iliadis 2001. Iliadis 2005.
15 The east panel was destroyed when the east part of the dome collapsed. After the reconstruction, the decoration was restored in wall-painting, in imitation of the decoration in the other panels. The wall-painting was renewed in 1889.
16 Only the inscription survives.
17 Torp 2002, 20-21.
18 Torp 2002, 13.
19 Kleinbauer 1982, 36.
20 Summarily Pazaras 1985, 38.
21 Gounaris 1972. Kleinbauer 1972, 72-73.
22 Servant of the soldier Onesiphoros, according to Ch. Diehl (Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 28).
23 Kleinbauer 1982.
24 Pazaras 1985, 43.
25 Kiilerich 2007, 321-336.
26 Bakirtzis et al. 2008a.
27 Soteriou 1970-1972. Manolis Korres has rendered this view in a drawing.
28 Dyggve 1953, 69. Torp 1963, 37.
29 Nasrallah 2005, with relevant bibliography.
30 L'Orange 1970, 262. Kleinbauer 1972, 29-32.
31 The earlier dating was proposed by Ch. Diehl (Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 30) and supported in a series of publications by E. Dyggve 1953, 68-69, H.P. L'Orange 1970, 267, St. Pelekanidis 1963, 34-47, H. Torp 1991, 13-28 (with reference to his previous publications), Sl. Ćurčić 2000, 15-17, and others. The mosaics were assigned to the art of the 5th century by O. Wulff 1914, O.M. Dalton 1925, and others. A. Mentzos 2001-2002, 57-82, proposes *circa* 437 as the year when the Rotunda was converted into a Church, M. Vickers 1970, 183-185, the mid-5th century, and E. Kleinbauer 1972, 27-108, the years 450-480. J.-M. Spieser 2005, 437-446 (with reference to his previous publications) returned to the early 6th century, following the dating by E. Weigand 1939, even though even later datings, up to the 7th century, are not unknown (Holtzinger 1899).
32 Ćurčić 2000, 11-14.
33 Bakirtzis – Mastora 2011. The monograph 'The Mausoleum of Constantine the Great in Thessaloniki', by Ch. Bakirtzis and P. Mastora, is in preparation.
34 Bakirtzis et al. 2008a.
35 Walter 2006, figs 15, 17, 18. Schlunk 1988, pls 9-11.

74





76



EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU

THE MOSAIC DECORATION IN THE CONCHES OF THE GROUND FLOOR

The mural mosaics preserved in three conches of the ground floor comprise a special group in the decoration of the Rotunda.[36]

The west conch, which corresponds to the west main entrance into the church, is decorated with an open-ended geometric pattern. On the gold ground, tangential circles form deep-blued quatrefoils, inside which are swastika motifs in red tesserae, emphasized by a row of silver ones. The wide frame consists of alternating circles and rectangles, formed by a scrolling band of rows of red and silver tesserae. Inscribed in each circle is a square enclosing a basket of fruit. Correspondingly, inscribed in each rectangle is a lozenge framing a bird. Depicted in the interstices between the circles and the rectangles are birds – geese, parrots and doves (fig. 76).

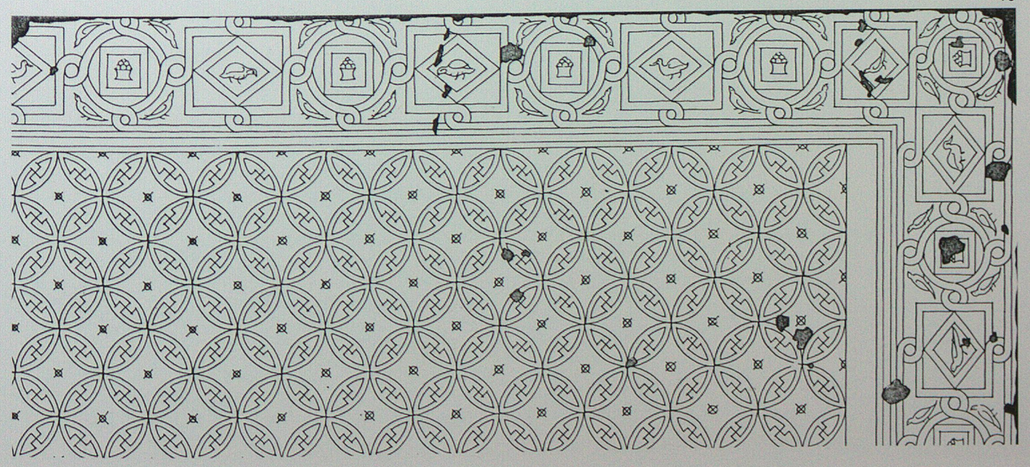
On the vault of the southeast conch, between the apse of the holy bema and the south entrance, the ground is covered by octagons with incurved sides, connected by roundels at their four corners. The narrow bands linking the roundels with the octagons are red and gem-studded. The roundels are gold inside, surrounded by two concentric bands, one deep blue and the other silver. Alternat-

76-78. In the mosaic in the west conch an open-ended geometric interlace against a gold ground is flanked by baskets of fruit and birds, recalling images of paradisial abundance.

77



78



ing on the gold ground of the octagons are birds and fruits – apples, pears and pomegranates. The wide band is divided into panels in which vases alternate with flowers or fruits and baskets of fruit. Between the panels is a gold palmette on the red ground (figs 79-82).

In the south conch, which corresponds to the original main south entrance to the Rotunda, the mosaic decoration differs from that in the other conches in both the subjects and their composition. Dominant at the centre of the vault, against a ground of silver tesserae, is a large gold Latin cross (figs 83-87).

The painter placed the cross in such a way that worshippers inside the church, as well as those entering through the south portal would see it in its correct position, with the long vertical arm downwards. The cross is surrounded asymmetrically by eight-rayed stars. The rest of the motifs are arranged symmetrically, in rows transverse to the axis of the vault. There are alternating rows of: (a) small fruit-filled gold bowls set on a stem from which sprout two soft acanthus leaves in deep blue; (b) fowl –pheasants with red neckband and geese with necklace of white pearl-like beads (H. Torp interprets these neckbands as schematic plumage around the neck);[37] (c) small gold bowls set on a stem from which sprout schematic green leaves that

79-80. Details of the mosaic in the southeast conch, with birds, vases and baskets of fruits projected upon a geometric interlace.

81-82. In the southeast conch the schematic geometric interlace is variegated with birds and fruits, vases and baskets overflowing with fruits.

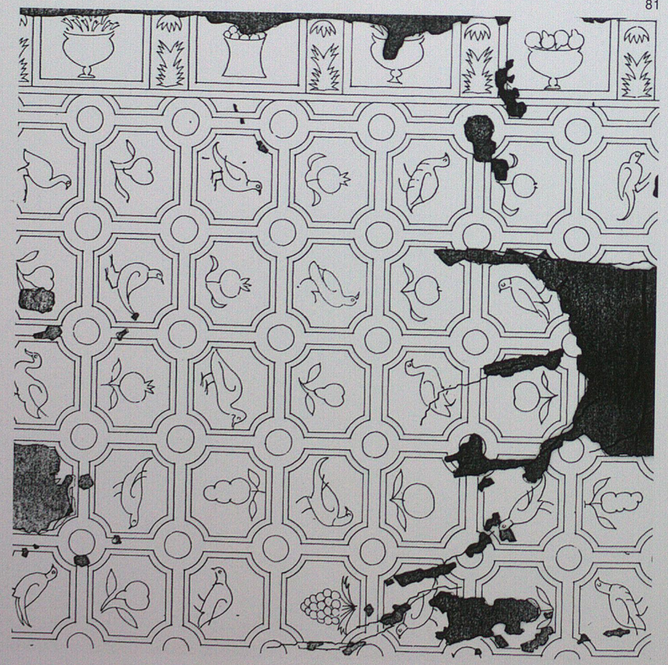
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turn inwards, taking the form of a bird's head, the stems of the cups terminate below in 'drops'; (d) bowls carrying a fleur de lis motif.

The vault is framed by a wide band with gold ground, projected against which are quatrefoils with alternating green and deep-blue leaves. Enclosed in the squares formed between the quatrefoils is a cruciform ornament with red centre.

ICONOGRAPHIC - STYLISTIC REMARKS

The subjects of the mural mosaics in the two ground-floor conches, the west and the southeast, as well as the arched openings at the base of the dome, derive from the artistic tradition of Late Antiquity, as this was continued in funerary painting in tombs of Early Christian times.[38] The birds and the baskets of fruit symbolize fecundity and wealth, they allude to the image of Paradise, a place in which spiritual fruits abound.[39] The geometric motifs and their compositions, such as the circles and the octagons with incurved sides, inscribed within which are birds and fruit, swastikas and quatrefoils, as well as the gem-studded bands, are familiar subjects in fourth- and fifth-century mosaics. In Thessaloniki in particular, these subjects are encountered in the mosaic pavements of the south *parekklesion* in the Panorama basilica (second half of 5th century), where vases with fruit, pomegranates, figs and pears, are depicted in the squares connected by circles;[40] in a pavement northeast of the baptistery of Hagia Sophia (post mid-4th century), where shallow bowls of fruit, birds and fish are inscribed in a pattern of octagons;[41] in the mosaic pavement of a portico leading to a martyrion, near the hospital of St Demetrios (early 6th century), octagons linked by swastikas enclose birds and baskets of fruit.[42] They occur too in the mural mosaics on the arcades of the Acheiropoietos, where, in addition to geometric motifs and the rich floral decoration, techniques similar to those in the Rotunda are distinguished, such as the rows of silver tesserae next to red ones, for emphasis, and red 'gem-studded' bands.[43] The repeated patterns on the gold ground and the variegated edges of the mosaic in the vaults of the Rotunda create the sense of a carpet. Their provenance has been sought in Persian silk textiles.[44]

In particular, researchers have discussed the decoration of the south conch, which differs from the rest. On the basis of the motif of the schematic green leaves which curve towards the stem, and which he characterized as Sassanid, J.-M. Spieser compares it with the architectural sculptures in the church of St Polyeuktos in Con-



83. In the south vault, covering the south entrance to the Rotunda, dominant against the silver ground is a large gold cross surrounded by stars, symbol of heaven.

stantinople (524-527). In his opinion it is an innovation due to the influence of Sassanid art in this period.[45] H. Torp agrees that the composition in the south conch, with the symmetrical arrangement of motifs and the uniform ground of silver tesserae, without panels, gives the impression of a silk textile, which is attributed to the influence of Sassanid art.[46] Nonetheless, he interprets the gold bowls as an offering to the Cross-Christ, in correspondence with the representations of 'triumph' in Roman imperial art.

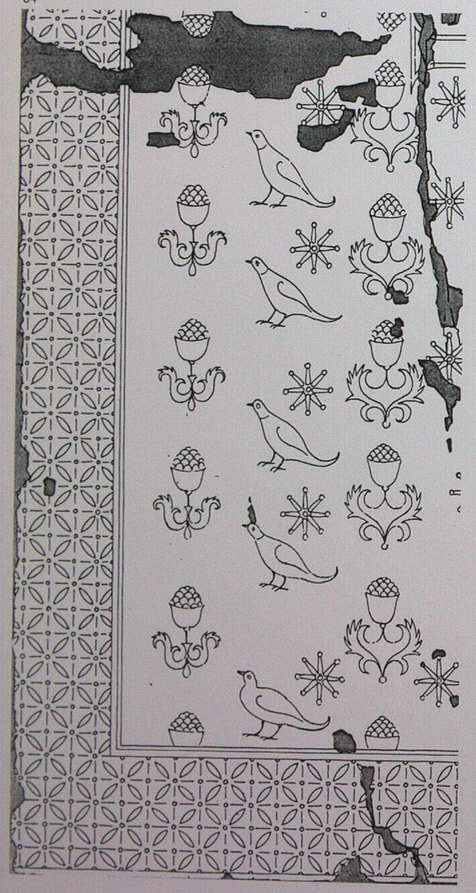
DATING

It is obvious that the mural mosaics in the ground-floor vaults were executed when, during the conversion of the Rotunda into a church, an ambulatory with shed roof was constructed around the

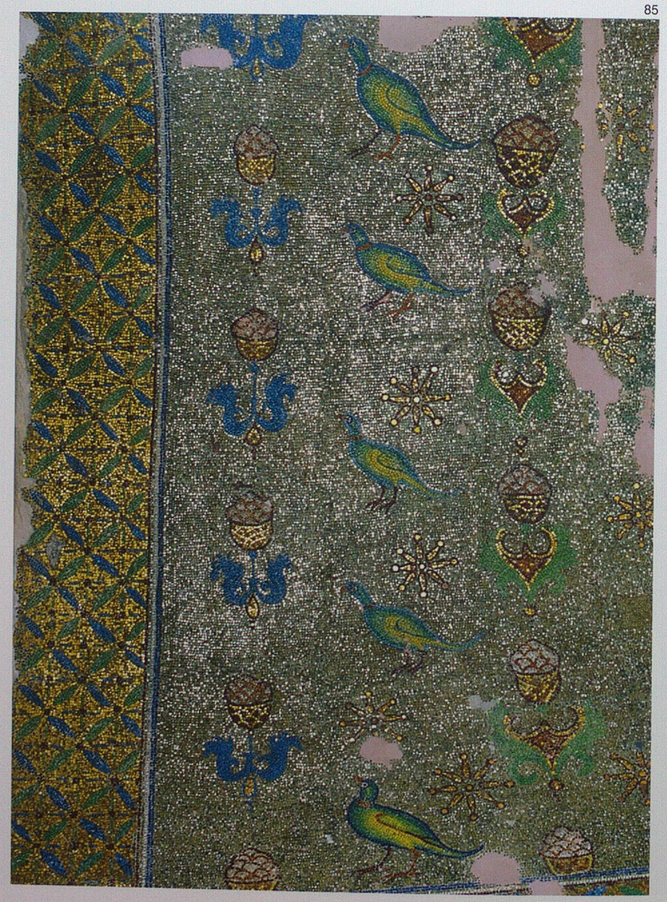
84. South conch (drawing).

85-87. Around the symbol of the cross in the south vault, partridges and pheasants with necklace, and golden bowls with fruits and leaves, create a paradisial image.

84



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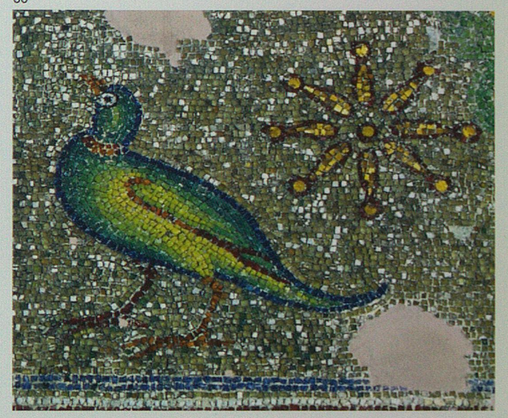
perimeter and an annexe was added on either side of the south entrance.[47] The ambulatory communicated freely with the church proper, through the conches, which evidently were not walled up, because it has been ascertained that the mosaic extends to the outermost edge of the vault. The later wall that blocked them was built when the ambulatory had collapsed.

J.-M. Spieser accepts H. Torp's view regarding the composition in the south conch, namely that the execution of the mosaic decoration prior to the sixth century cannot be ruled out.[48] It is not possible to draw exact chronological conclusions from stylistic analyses alone, nor, of course, to date the ensemble of mural mosaics in the Rotunda from the isolated 'Sassanid' subject of the south conch.

A new piece of evidence, which came to light during conservation works on the mosaics in the ground-floor conches, is added to the deliberation on the dating. Significant differences between the three conches were observed in the technique of setting the tesserae.[49]

It was ascertained that the plaster of the south vault is of different constitution and is more resistant than that in the other conches. The materials in the plaster were finer and the tesserae used in the south vault are bigger. These differences could be interpreted as indicating that the mosaics in the ground-floor vaults were not executed contemporaneously. It is possible that the decoration of the south vault is due to an upgrading of the importance of the south entrance, linked with the liturgical use of the annexes flanking it.

86



87



NOTES

36 Spieser 1984, 132-149, with analytical description and previous bibliography.
37 Torp 2001, 298.
38 Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 1997, 128-132.
39 Marki 2005, 85-91.
40 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1998, 263-264 and 331, pls XLVII, XLIII, XLIX.
41 Marki 2005, fig. 7.
42 Marki 2005, fig. 9.
43 See below E. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou, Acheiropoietos, p. 236.
44 Grabar 1953, 49.
45 Spieser 1984, 138-139.
46 Torp 2001, 311-313. Cf. Gonosová 1987, 227-237.
47 Moutsopoulos 1984, 355-375. Theocharidou 1991-1992, 57-76. Torp 1991, 13-28.
48 Spieser 2005, 437-446.
49 Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 1990, 45-47. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 2001, 4. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 2005, 447-456.



SAINT DEMETRIOS

CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS

SAINT DEMETRIOS

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

The basilica of St Demetrios, built on a natural terrace in the middle of Thessaloniki, was visible from afar, its presence dominating the city prior to the building of the recent high-rise apartment blocks. The founding of the basilica is associated with the site of a large public bathhouse where, hagiological tradition has it, St Demetrios was incarcerated, martyred and buried at the time of the persecution of Christians, in the early fourth century.[1] After the edict on religious tolerance was issued in 311, by the augustus Galerius (C. Galerius Valerius Maximianus), whose seat was Thessaloniki, and the cessation of the persecutions, an *oikiskos* was founded, which housed the tomb of St Demetrios and where miraculous cures of the sick took place.[2]

1. Part of the mosaic 'St Demetrios with the builders of the basilica' (see fig. 47).

2. The face of St Demetrios from the mosaic 'St Demetrios with the deacon' (see fig. 49).

3. View of the basilica of St Demetrios from southwest today.

3



2

The *oikiskos* was very similar to the first public Christian prayer house *(eukterios oikos)* which was founded in about the same period at the centre of Philippi, next to the tomb of Apostle Paul, and was a long building incorporated in the court of a Hellenistic heroon.[3]

The *oikiskos* cannot have functioned for long. It is noted in the *Martyrologia (Passiones) of St Demetrios* that the Eparch of Illyricum, Leontios, demolished the *oikiskos* and in its place *raised an all-holy oikos (ἀνήγειρεν πάνσεπτον οἶκον)* in the martyr's honour. If the hagiological tradition about the martyrdom of St Demetrios does indeed contain elements of historical certainty and of topographical significance, then the founding of a church to replace the *oikiskos* and the establishment of the cult of the healer-saint already by the fourth century are not unlikely.[4] The conch uncovered inside the holy bema of the basilica of St Demetrios belongs to the first church.[5] Leontios is documented as Eparch of Illyricum in 412/3, but the list of eparchs of Illyricum has many gaps. H. Delehaye (1909) and other distinguished hagiologists have argued that the cult of a deacon-saint Demetrios at Sirmion is earlier than the cult of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki, and, as M. Vickers (1974) expounded later, the cult of St Demetrios was introduced to Thessaloniki from Sirmion, after that city's destruction by the Huns in 441.[6] In addition to Emperor Leo I (457-474), the Pope of Rome Leo the Great (440-461) has been added recently to the possible founders of the basilica of St Demetrios in the fifth century.[7] G. and M. Soteriou, relying on coins and other finds from excavations inside the church, finally proposed that the basilica of St Demetrios was founded in the mid- or the second half of the fifth century.[8] On the basis of R. Kautzsch's (1936) dating of the column capitals in the basilica, and other remarks on the construction, the view has been expressed that the basilica can be dated up to the second quarter of the sixth century.[9]

Although the exact date of the church of St Demetrios is not known, its destruction by fire and rebuilding is an event referred to in the *Miracles of St Demetrios* (II, 3, 224-229) and attested in a historical inscription (see below no. 11, p. 174). According to P. Lemerle, this event happened around 620.[10] Consequently, the building history of the monument, except the founding in the mid- or the second half of the fifth century, includes also its reconstruction in the early seventh century, the extent of which is not known. After 620 the church was an important pilgrim shrine for East and West, because it housed the tomb of St Demetrios.

Centre of the cult of St Demetrios was the baldachin set up in about the middle of the middle aisle of the basilica.[11] The baldachin was considered the *oikos* of the saint and all those who wished to visit him

encountered him there. The baldachin contained a bier, as it were *(ὡσανεὶ κραββάτιον)*, of silver, imprinted on which was his figure (*Miracles* I, 1, 22), an icon of the saint seated on a small couch or throne (*Miracles* I, 7, 66 and 10, 88), other icons and a candle-stand. In a way, it was a substitute for his tomb, the position of which the Thessaloniki Church kept a closely-guarded secret, so as to protect the saint's relic from being dismembered and translated to Constantinople, as had been requested first by Justinian I (527-565) and later by Maurice (582-602). The original baldachin was hexagonal and of marble, as is known from a description by the Archbishop of Thessaloniki Niketas (first half of the 12th century).[12] It is depicted in the mosaic in the first south aisle (no. 1, p. 144. Later, it was replaced by a silver one (wood with silver revetment), which is described in the *Miracles of St Demetrios* (I, 10, 87) and is depicted in the mosaics of the north small colonnade (no. 3c, p. 152). When Constantinople stopped demanding the relic of St Demetrios, his tomb appeared, before the end of the seventh century, in the northwest bay of the basilica, and the texts about St Demetrios ceased to mention the baldachin in the middle aisle. The cult of the healing *myron* (myrrh), after which St Demetrios was given the epithet *myrovlytis* (gushing myrrh), developed around his tomb and relic. The saint's reputation spread far and wide, and he was particularly honoured in the Slav world.[13]

From the outset, the cult of St Demetrios was related to miraculous cures. From disparate snippets of information in the *Miracles of St Demetrios*, it is clear that in the basilica there functioned a *xenon* (hospital), like the famous Sampson hospital near Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.[14] For this reason, in the *Miracles* the church of St Demetrios is called *iamatikos* (curative), *iamatoklytos* (cure-calling), *iamatophoros* (cure-bringing), *hygiodoros* (health-giving) and *pigi ton iamaton* (source of cures). The therapeutic process in the *xenon* of St Demetrios was based not only on Hippocratic medicine, which was practised by the *xenon*'s physicians, but also on the miracles of St Demetrios, as was the case in the churches of other healing saints, such as St Isidore on the island of Chios, or Sts Cyrus and John in the church of the Evangelists, east of Alexandria in Egypt. The role of St Demetrios as miracle-worker and healer is referred to also in early hymnography, by Patriarch Germanos the Confessor (645-740): *...τῶν θαυμάτων εἴληφας τὴν ἐνέργειαν, / ἀνθρώποις παρέχων τὰς ἰάσεις ἀψθόνως* (you received the power of miracles, offering cures for men generously).[15]

The therapeutic intervention of St Demetrios did not consist of

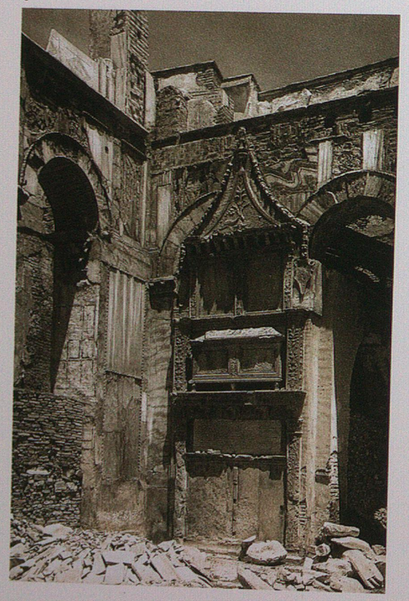
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medicines or medical advice, as was the case with other doctor saints of the same period in Constantinople, such as St Artemios in the church of St John the Evangelist, or Sts Cosmas and Damian in the homonymous church at Kosmidion. St Demetrios cured exclusively through silent miracle-working, appearing in a vision in the patients' sleep *(incubatio)* and making the sign of the cross on their forehead. In this respect, the procedure in the *xenon* of St Demetrios is closer to the miraculous cures in the Serapeion of Thessaloniki, as known from inscriptions, than to the methods of Asklepios, who combined surgery, pharmacology, physiotherapy and miracle-working physic through touching the patients.

After the capture of Thessaloniki by the Turks, in 1430, the church of St Demetrios remained in Christian hands, by order of Sultan Murad II, on condition that its *kosmos (*liturgical furniture, icons, books, etc.) be removed. Unable to function as a Christian place of

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4. The northwest corner of the central aisle and the tomb of Loukas Spantounis before the fire in 1917 (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

5. The tomb of Loukas Spantounis after the fire in 1917 (photo. 1917).

6. The central aisle of the basilica at the beginning of restoration works (photo. A.H.S Megaw, 1932).

7. The phiale prior to its demolition.

8. The west front of the basilica of St Demetrios today.

worship, the church fell into disuse.[16] It was used as a sheltered court of St Demetrios' tomb, from which the *myron-hagiasma* continued to spurt. In 1493 the basilica was converted into a mosque for Muslim worship, the Kasimie cami. The tomb of St Demetrios was blocked off from the rest of the church and remained under the protection of the Dervish Order as a place of pilgrimage.[17]

After the Greek Army liberated Thessaloniki from the Ottomans, in 1912, the church, along with the greater part of the city, was burnt in 1917, during the First World War. Restoration work lasted several decades, under the direction of Professor Georgios Soteriou and architect Aristotelis Zachos, whose monogram is etched on a window of the west front. It was completed when Stylianos Pelekanidis was Ephor of Byzantine Antiquities in Thessaloniki and the church was re-consecrated in 1948. Since then it has been a place of pilgrimage, particularly honoured by the city's inhabitants and visitors.

7



8



ARCHITECTURE

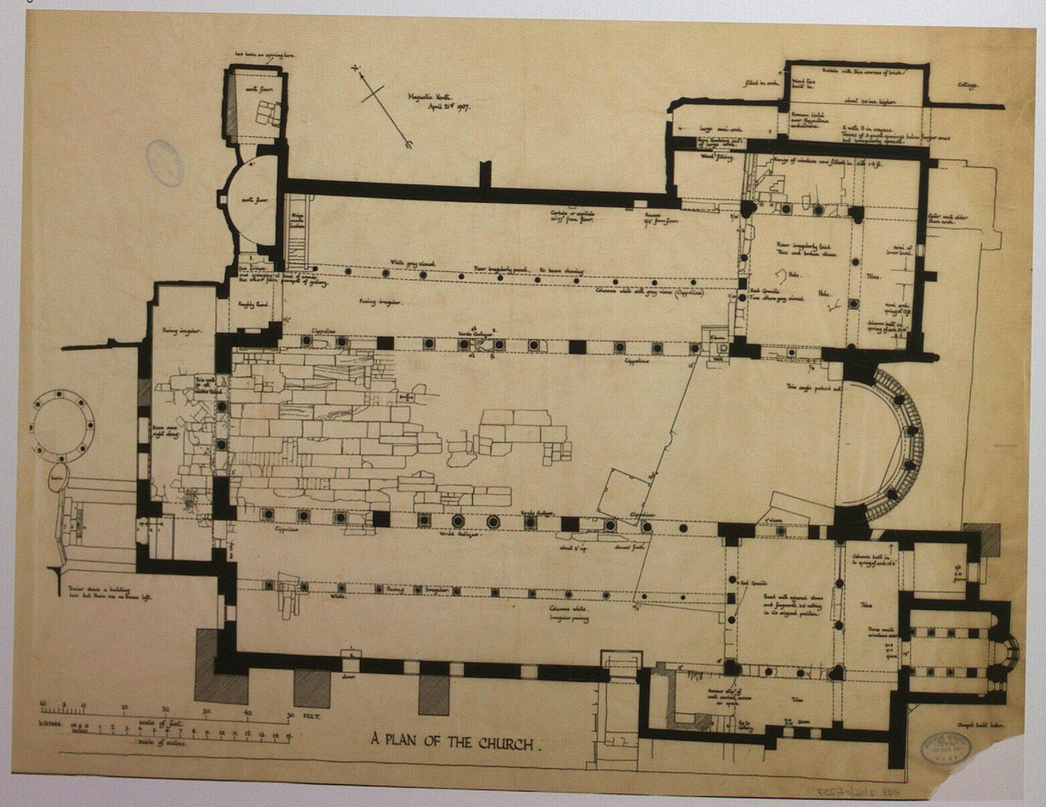
To this day, the church of St Demetrios survives in the type of the five-aisled, timber-roofed basilica with transept and galleries. It never had an atrium and the main entrance was from the south. The central thoroughfare of the city (*decumanus*, present Agiou Dimitriou Street), which linked two main gates of Thessaloniki, the Letaia Gate to the west and the New Golden Gate to the east, passed by this side. North of the church there were outbuildings, a funerary chapel of St John the Baptist, cisterns, rooms of the *xenon* and the Roman bathhouse. These ruins are archaeological proof of the tradition relating to St Demetrios. West of the church there was a west court, instead of an atrium, in which the eparch and other dignitaries met the city's public. What is today called the 'crypt' and is underground, in the east part of the basilica, under the conch of the holy bema, in a way served as an atrium. The

9. Ground plan of the basilica of St Demetrios with details that no longer survive (drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

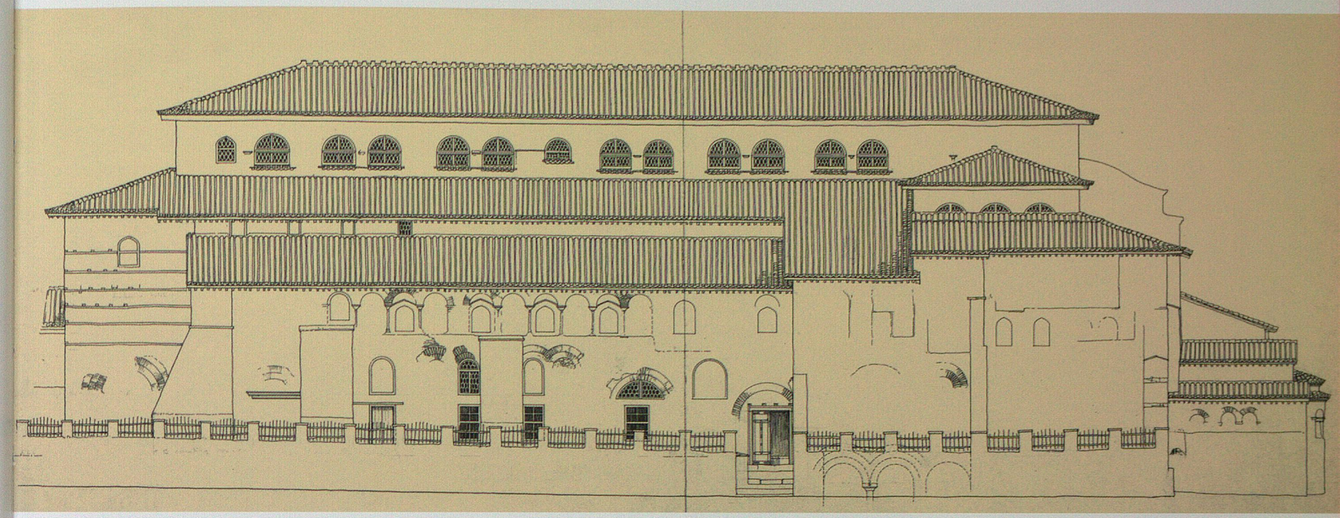
10. South face of the basilica of St Demetrios (drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

11. Transverse section westward of the basilica of St Demetrios showing the *opus sectile* mural decoration and the marble dado on the west side of the central aisle, and other details that only partially survive today. The *opus sectile* murals depicted (in imitation) the tribelon opening with columns, the drawn-back curtains (vela) and the west entrances to the basilica. The dado included slabs of white marble and slabs of veined marble split and opened into four so that the symmetrical correspondence of the veining gave the impression of a pattern or even a motif (colour drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

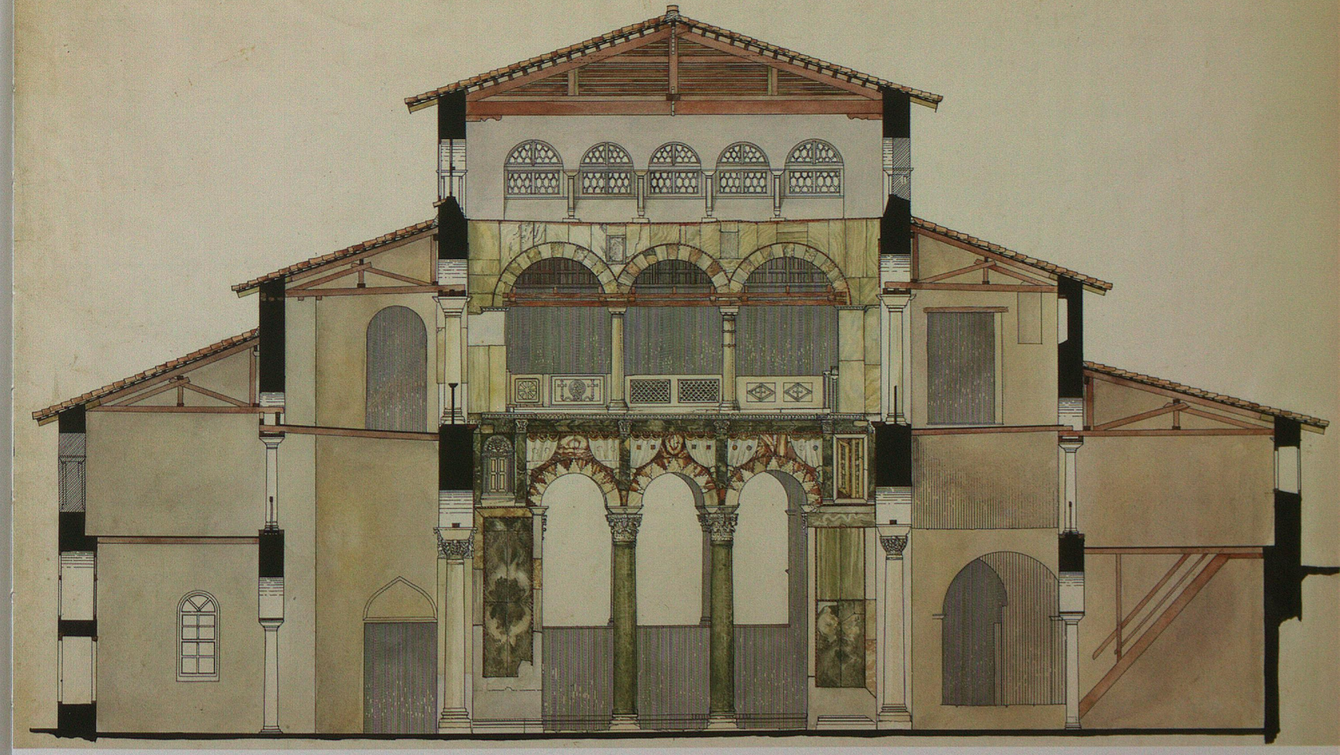
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'crypt' was originally at ground level and accessible from the street at right angle to the *decumanus*, the *cardo* (present Agiou Nikolaou Street), which passed to the east of the basilica. It was a kind of Nymphaeum, from which the *myron-hagiasma* of St Demetrios spurted in Late Byzantine times.[18]

At the southeast corner of the basilica and in front of an outside entrance, of which the marble doorframe is preserved, a parekklesion dedicated to St Euthymios was added in the tenth century. In the type of a three-aisled basilica, it was decorated with wall-paintings in 1303 by the official Michael Glavas Tarchaneiotes and his wife Maria.

The two central colonnades of the basilica of St Demetrios repeat the symmetry and regularity of colonnades in Antiquity, but in a different way. Four-sided piers are interpolated between the columns, dividing each colonnade into three parts: three columns of white marble, four of green Thessalian marble and three of white marble.[19] This original arrangement of the columns and primarily the piers, which define the angles of a quadrangle, evoke the presence of a

12

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14



12. Longitudinal cross-section southwards of the basilica of St Demetrios showing the *opus sectile* mural decoration and the marble dado on the north side of the central aisle, and other details now lost or that only partially survive today. The *opus sectile* on the fronts of the two central colonnades did not depict anything specific but simply 'decorated' with geometric quadrilateral emblems and with false dentils below the cornice of the gallery surrounding the fronts of the colonnades with false voussoirs (drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

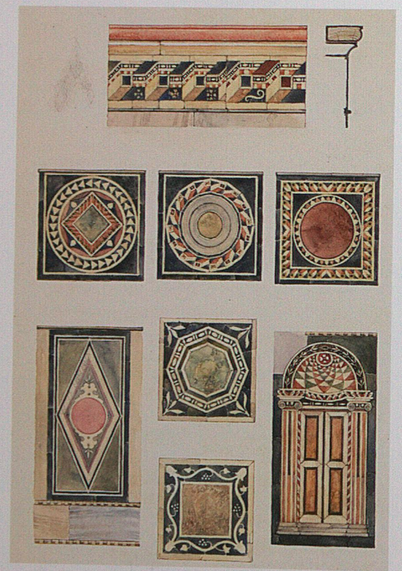
13. Part of the north side of the basilica of St Demetrios. Visible are four columns of green Thessalian marble on bases of differing height, the *opus sectile* decoration on the front of the central north colonnade and, behind, the north small colonnade with mosaics that were destroyed in the 1917 fire (photo. by Fred Boissonnas).

14. St Demetrios from the founder mosaic of the north small colonnade (colour drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

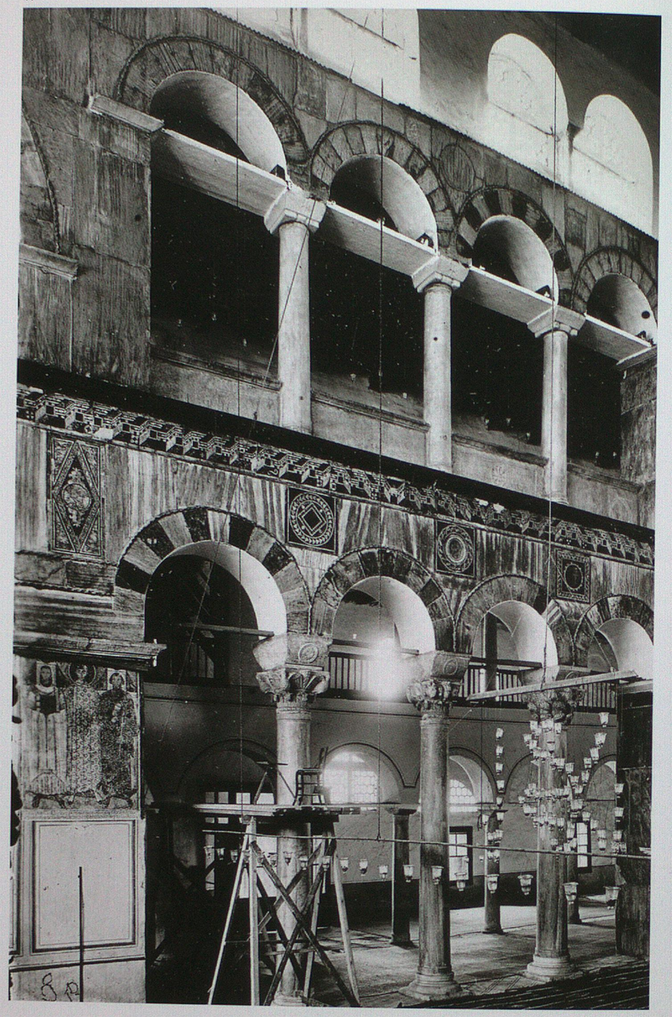
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15. False capital of a pilaster of the central colonnade with peacocks and acanthus.

16. *Opus sectile* decoration of emblems a doorway inside a conch and false dentil band, from the front of the north colonnade (colour drawing by W.S. George, 1907).

17. The south side of the basilica of St Demetrios before the 1917 fire (photo. 1908).

18. Theodosian column capital of a central colonnade.

19. The north side of the central aisle of the basilica of St Demetrios before the 1917 fire (photo. by Fred Boissonnas).

vertical axis, the establishment of which in Byzantine architecture led to the appearance of the Byzantine dome.

The 'symmetry' of the colonnades is repeated also in the column capitals, which are in second use (*spolia*) and are matched in opposite pairs.[20] This kind of 'symmetry' is encountered also in the mosaics of the arcades in the Acheiropoietos basilica, as well as in the decoration in the panels in the Rotunda. With the repetition of the same subject in opposed pairs, the concept of beginning and end are abolished, and the sense of perpetual motion (eternity) is introduced.

The central aisle of the church had a marble dado and insets in *opus sectile* technique, which date to two periods.[21] The earlier decoration, which is preserved on the west wall of the middle aisle imitates the tribelon opening with the columns, the curtains (vela) and the entrances on this side. The marble dado and the *opus-sectile* panels of the second period did not depict something specific but revetted the fronts of the two central colonnades with geometric motifs, creating above the columns quadrilateral emblems filled with *opus sectile* of diverse shapes, adding false dentils/mutules below the cornice of the gallery and surrounding the fronts of the arcades with false voussoirs.

18



19



20



THE MOSAICS

The basilica of St Demetrios is famed also for its mosaics. Mosaics nos 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15 in the catalogue that follows were uncovered in the course of repairs made to the Kasimie cami in 1907-1908, and attracted international interest. Of these, the mosaics of the small north colonnade (no. 3) are known today only from old photographs and drawings, because they were almost completely destroyed in the great fire of 1917, excepting very few parts of them. Mosaics nos 2, 6, 10, 12, 16 were revealed after the 1917 fire.

The precise dating of the mosaics of the basilica of St Demetrios from the period between the founding of the church and the ninth century is a debated issue still unresolved. Their arrangement in two groups follows to this day the building history of the basilica. The mosaics from before and the mosaics from after the destruction and renovation of the basilica in the early seventh century differ not only chronologically but also stylistically.[22] In the earlier mosaics, St Demetrios appears as in the narrations in the First *Book of Miracles*, bathed in visionary light,[23] which is why he needs continuous testimonies of eyewitnesses. In the later mosaics, St Demetrios is depicted in a pragmatic environment, together with donors and other persons, participating with them in the life of the city, as the inscriptions accompanying them also attest. However, as we shall see below, internal differences preclude a generalized application of this classification. Mosaics of the same or related style seem to belong to different periods. I believe that a disassociation of the style of the mosaics from the building history of the basilica would be useful in achieving a more accurate dating of them.

The interpretation of the iconographic programme remains an open question because, as Ch. Diehl has pointed out, it does not belong to the iconographic programmes of other Early Christian churches and does not include scenes from the Gospel and the Old Testament.[24] The mosaics comprise independent votive panels dedicated by donors to commemorate beneficial acts of St Demetrios, the Virgin and other saints to them, their families, the martyr's church and the city of Thessaloniki.

The spatial arrangement of the mosaics in the basilica of St Demetrios points out a route of proskynesis that commences from the south main entrance, where there was a portico with mosaics, >south first aisle, > narthex, > entrance to chamber of the sick (subsequent tomb of St Demetrios), > north first aisle, > north wing of transept, >holy bema. The presentation of the mosaics will follow this route.

20. The angel from the mosaic 'St Demetrios and the angel' (see fig. 24). An angel emerges from bright and colourful heavenly clouds that recall the spectacular sunsets over the Thermaic Gulf of Thessaloniki. He holds the healing wand of wood sheathed with gold, which he offers to St Demetrios.

21-22. The mosaic 'Children thanking St Demetrios'. St Demetrios exits his marble baldachin to receive children advancing towards him. They have come out of a building which is indicated by the marble pier and the gilded krater. The scene is set in the countryside, with a rocky landscape and tall trees in the background, the Upper City (Ano Polis) of Thessaloniki?

21



1. CHILDREN THANKING ST DEMETRIOS

The mosaic is on the west wall of the first south aisle, above the entrance to the narthex.[25] Two-thirds of it is preserved. St Demetrios, orans and in frontal pose, appears at the centre of the representation. As in all the mosaic representations in the basilica, he wears a chiton with embroidery on the shoulders and at the height of the knees, a cloth-of-silver chlamys with tablion,[26] white hose and black bound boots. This costume is characterized as consular, and the *Miracles of St Demetrios* (I, 3, 42) describe the saint *ὥς τινα ὕπατον παρὰ βασιλέως ἐξουσίαν λαβόντα διανεῖμαι τῷ δήμῳ τὰς χάριτας* (as if he were a consul who had received from the king the authority to distribute benefactions to the people).[27] However, the orant soldiers depicted in the Rotunda wear exactly the same garb. I believe that these superbly comely figures were the iconographic model for the depiction of St Demetrios orans and of other orant saints in the mosaics of the basilica. Consequently, the attire of St Demetrios is not exclusively consular, but is the formal costume of a civilian official or a military officer.

There is a barely perceptible smile on St Demetrios' lips and he radiates light. Thessalonikans recognize in his friendly figure their saintly patron and protector as *ἀκτινοβολοῦντα, ὑπομειδιῶντα καὶ ψαιδρωπόν* (radiant, incipiently smiling and of jovial aspect). The gold cuffs, which to this day usually cover the hands of saints in devotional icons, are rendered by gold tesserae.

St Demetrios has just emerged from his baldachin, to receive those who advance towards him. He steps on a low marble footstool. The shape of the baldachin corresponds to the description of the first marble hexagonal baldachin by Archbishop Niketas of Thessaloniki (first half of 12th century). The baldachin is covered by green vela. From the right come two figures. As A. Grabar observed, they have come out of a building that is denoted by the marble pillar and the gold krater.[28] The first figure is a child. The second figure, older and of unknown sex, places its hands on the child's shoulders and guides him with the appropriate respect towards St Demetrios. He outstretches his arms under his himation, thanking the saint for one of his miracles, which is not named but is none other than the cure. St Demetrios, by his pose, transmits his thanks and his prayers to God. The child wears a cloth-of-gold himation and the second figure a snow-white himation. Both figures wear an inner closed chiton with slit at the neck. Is this the *chitoniskos* (shift) worn by the sick in the *xenon* of St Demetrios? Visible on the other side is a second

22



child in the same pose, who has come closer to St Demetrios. No child touches the saint. The scene takes place in the countryside. The earth is green. Included in the graduated tones of green are the shadows of the figures, excepting that of St Demetrios. In the background is a rocky landscape with tall trees.

The mosaic is in the part of the basilica that survived the fire *circa* 620 and is one of the two earliest mosaics. Furthermore, it dates to the period before the marble baldachin was replaced by the silver one.

23-24. The mosaic 'St Demetrios and the angel' or 'The establishing of St Demetrios as chief physician', which is not preserved fully. The angel offers to St Demetrios the physician's staff, thus conferring upon him the God-given gift of healing.

23



2. ST DEMETRIOS AND THE ANGEL. THE ESTABLISHING OF ST DEMETRIOS AS CHIEF PHYSICIAN

The mosaic is on the west wall of the first north aisle, above the entrance to the narthex.[29] It is in a particularly significant position, in front of the entrance to the chamber for the sick. Only one-third of the left part of the representation survives.

Depicted below is St Demetrios in formal costume. His face is executed in tiny tesserae, in shades of pink. The gold light of the halo at once illumines and shades the face, emphasizing its substance. The hair is short, as was the fashion for young men in Late Antiquity. Above, an angel emerges from the bright multi-coloured clouds of heaven, which bring to mind the spectacular sunsets over the Thermaic Gulf of Thessaloniki, and gazes towards St Demetrios.

Discernible to the right are the wings of another angelic figure and a hand in supplication. The angel does not hold a trumpet, as was formerly thought, but a wooden staff sheathed in gold, wider on one side and narrower on the other, which he offers to St Demetrios. This is the healing staff, like that held by Christ-physician in representations of the Raising of Lazarus. In offering the physician's staff to St Demetrios, the angel confers upon him, from God, the gift of healing. *Τὸν ... τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων προϊστάμενον ... δοξάζομεν Χριστὸν τὸν Θεόν, τὸν ἐνεργοῦντα δι' αὐτοῦ πᾶσι τὰ ἰάματα* (primate of the Thessalonikans we praise Christ the God, who through him provides cures for all), writes Andrew the Cretan in the second half of the seventh or the early eighth century.[30]

The scene is not known from any extant text. Nonetheless, it is mentioned in the *Miracles* (II, 4, 260) that St Demetrios holds the staff not to cure men but to save the city: *καὶ ῥάβδον ἐν τῇ χειρὶ ἐπιφερόμενος, καὶ ὡς ἐκεῖσε δὴ ἐκ τοῦ λεχθέντος παραπυλίου τῇ πόλει εἰσβαλόντας, τούτους ἐκδιώκειν καὶ τῇ ῥάβδῳ μαστίζειν* (He holds a staff in his hand and expels the barbarians who invaded the city from the said side-

gate, striking them with the staff). Indeed, given that the rest of the saints depicted in the basilica are well-known soldier-saints and wear the same attire, we venture to suggest that St Demetrios was introduced into cult as a military physician and that the model of the scene is the establishment of the head doctors in the army.

For the same reasons as in the case of the previous mosaic, this one is also assigned to the earliest mosaics in the basilica of St Demetrios.

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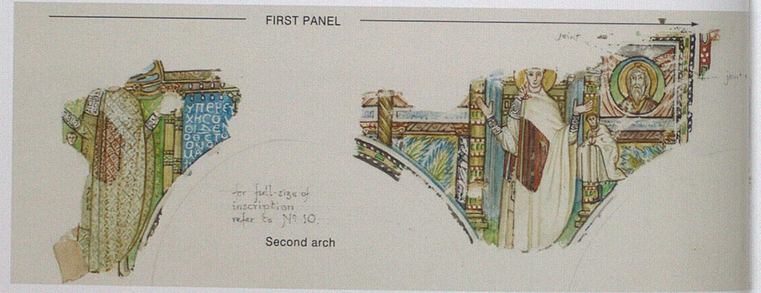


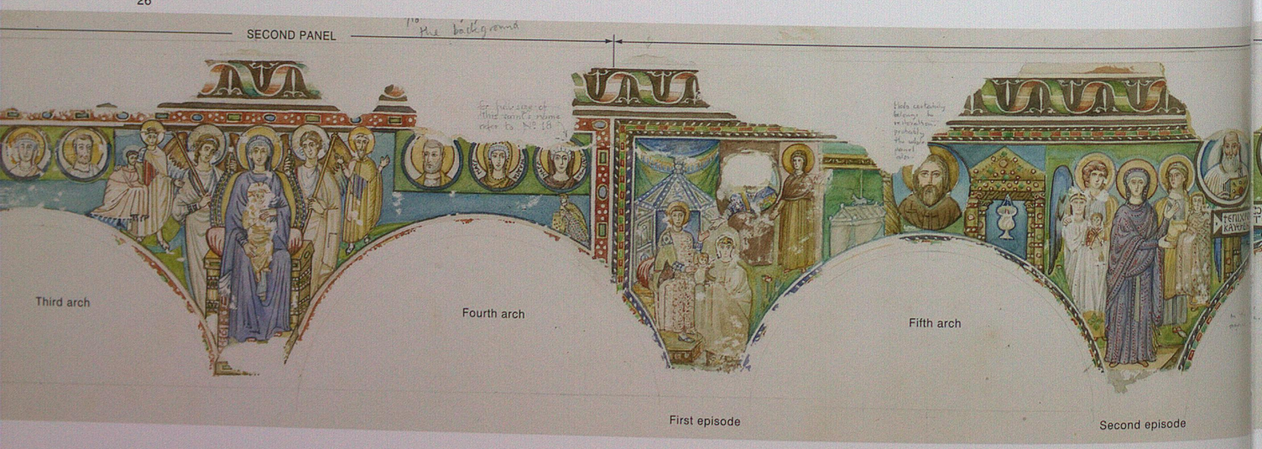
3. MOSAICS ON THE NORTH SMALL COLONNADE

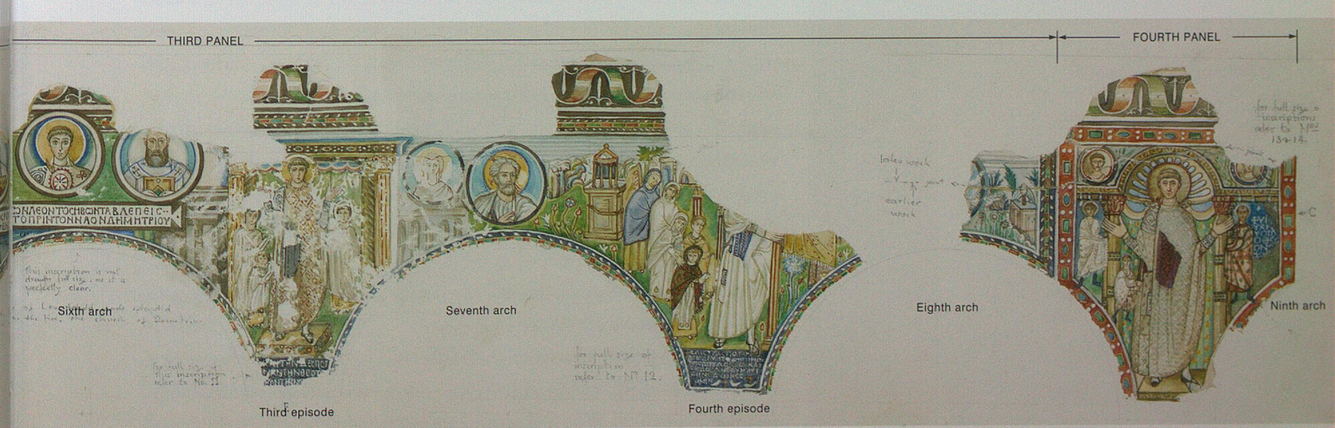
These mosaics were developed on the south front of the first nine arches –from the west– of the first north colonnade. They were almost completely destroyed in the 1917 fire and are known only from old photographs published by P. Papageorgiou (1908), Th. Uspenskij (1909), Ch. Diehl (1910) and O. Tafrali (1911), as well as from coloured drawings by W.S. George.[31] The mosaics were read from west to east and were best seen from the middle aisle, because its floor was higher than that of the two north aisles.[32] The representations are distributed in four panels, each one of which is different. It is surmised from the two surviving mosaic inscriptions that their subject too is the expression of gratitude, not only to St Demetrios but also to the Virgin and to the other saints for their benefactions. Indeed, the representations in the second panel (3b) and the third (3c) attest that the joint veneration of St Demetrios and the Virgin in Thessaloniki, known from later texts, goes back to early times.[33]

a. First panel: Offering thanks to saints

The first panel occupied the first, the second and half of the third arch of the colonnade. A luxurious frame imitating relief cymatia surrounds the representation, the beginning and middle of which are destroyed. Depicted on the axis of the first and the second column are two standing saints in prayer, formally dressed in embroidered chiton and pale-coloured chlamys with tablion.[34] The face of the first saint (left) is lost, as is the palm of his left hand, most probably in gold. Both saints stand in front of columned alcove porches of a building, after the model of the orant saints in front of apsidal buildings in the Rotunda. The open entrance on the left is closed by green vela embellished with precious stones. The closed entrance on the right is covered by blue velvet vela. The building is constructed of columns with inlaid decoration, while precious stones hang from its cornice. It stands on grass and has no wall. Visible between the columns is lush vegetation, resembling acanthus plants. In the background right is a colonnade with rectilinear epistyle, which could belong to a free-standing portico. However, I believe that it is a colonnade of a church, and specifically of the basilica of St Demetrios, the porches of which at the two west entrances are represented in the foreground. I consider it very likely that the two depicted saints, with which the series of mosaics begins, are custodians of the entrances to the church of St Demetrios. The marble and the silver baldachin of St Demetrios also had janitors.[35] In my opinion they are St Nestor (see below no. 6) and St Lupus. These two soldier-saints are associated directly with St Demetrios and are depicted as janitors on the octagonal Moscow reliquary (1059-1067), which is a replica of the baldachin of the tomb of







25-26. Mosaics on the front of the first nine arches of the north small colonnade. These were destroyed almost totally in 1917 and are known mainly from the colour drawings by W.S. George and old photographs. The representations were arranged in four panels with elaborately decorated frames. Their subject was the expression of gratitude by donors to St Demetrios, the Virgin and other saints for their benefactions.

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St Demetrios, and on the reliquaries in Halberstadt cathedral (10th century) and the Athonite monastery of Vatopedi (12th century).[36] From the frame of the representation hang rose-coloured arrases with circular openings, depicted in which are saints attending what is taking place. Preserved on the right is the figure of the prophet Zechariah.[37] A corresponding image will have existed in the top left corner of the panel.

In this milieu, two male figures are depicted in small scale, as if hovering, approaching the church of St Demetrios. All that survives of the first man on the left is his beardless face. The second man is bearded, has his hands under an opulent white himation with fringing and wears a tunic slit at the neck.[38] An inscription in silver tesserae, in an intercolumniation, *Ὑπὲρ εὐ/χῆς οὗ / οἶδεν / ὁ Θ(ε)ὸς τὸ / ὄνο/μα / †* (For the prayer of him whom God knows) is related to the expression of thanks by the two men.

b. Second panel: A couple thanks the Virgin with the mediation of saints

The second panel occupies half the third and almost the entire fourth arch of the colonnade. The representation has survived in good condition and is the most monumental in the series. It is surrounded by a red painted frame with white edges, embellished with inlaid decoration and precious stones. Depicted on the axis of the third column in the colonnade is the Virgin seated on a wood-carved throne with lyre-shaped back. Her feet rest on a footstool and in her arms she holds the Christ-Child, who blesses and holds a scroll.

The Virgin is accompanied by two Archangels, as in the icon in the Sinai monastery. On the left, a young man in luxurious himation and almost on his knees is led by St Demetrios to the Virgin. The female on the other side is depicted alone at the edge of the representation, which raises queries as to her interpretation.[39] In my view, judging by her squat, stout body, the woman is pregnant, which is why she was placed in a special position.[40] Richly attired and bedecked in jewellery, she speeds towards the Virgin with the intercession of St Theodore.[41]

In the top right and left corners of the panel, in square frames, male and female saints observed the representation through circular apertures: on the right are an unidentifiable saint, St Pelagia and St Matrona; on the left are an unidentifiable female saint and a male saint. Saints in medallions are present at the celebrations in the holy bema of the Sinai monastery and in the church of the Virgin Kanakaria on Cyprus. A. Grabar proposed that the saints in the first

27. Left: second panel. A couple thanks the enthroned Virgin and Christ with the intercession of saints. The woman is depicted pregnant at the right edge of the representation. Right: third panel, the first episode in the story of the child Maria. St Demetrios seated outside his silver baldachin receives the infant Maria, whom her mother dedicates to him.

28. Second panel. An unidentified male saint, St Pelagia and St Matrona watch the scene through round windows (photo. W.S. George).

29. Second panel. The enthroned Virgin and Christ flanked by two angels (photo. W.S. George).

two medallions, who turn towards the Virgin, should be identified as the leading Apostles, Paul left and Peter right.[42]

In my view the representation in this panel is related to the representations in the next one. The pregnant woman is Maria's mother. Maria and her mother are the protagonists in the four episodes in the panel that comes next. Maria's father has a secondary role.

Worthy of comment in this panel is the way in which 'space' is created, through the correlation of figures and the use of reverse perspective:[43] the Virgin's throne is seen from the left and slightly from above. Christ likewise: his left leg is seen from the left and his right from above. The interceding saints are behind the angels but in front of their wings. However, St Demetrios' left hand, which points to the Virgin, is in front of the angel. The advancing man is in front of St Demetrios. It could be assumed that he is in the foreground, together with the Virgin, but because of his small size he appears at the back. Last, whereas the lower part of the representation is behind the frame of the panel, the haloes of the figures are in front of the frame and project beyond it. The sense of non-conventional space is reinforced by the light-blue ground of heaven and the green grass of earth, on which the shadows of the figures are cast but which does not close any horizon.

c. Third panel: Expression of thanks by the child Maria and her parents, in four episodes

This panel occupies the fifth to the eighth arch of the colonnade. Depicted is the story of Maria, from infancy to childhood. The four scenes are continuous and the narrative is distinguished by an unusual affection. They are surrounded by a frame identical to that of the first panel.

First episode. This occupies a small part of the fourth and half of the fifth arch. In central place is St Demetrios, on the axis of the fourth column. He is depicted seated on a stool (*skimpodion*), outside the open entrance of the silver baldachin. The form of the baldachin fits the description in the *Miracles of St Demetrios* (I, 1, 22. 7, 66. 10, 88). The depiction of the baldachin in this position is not fortuitous. It is opposite the hexagonal baldachin in the middle aisle and in a way imitates reality. The green velum behind the baldachin heightens the sense of escape from reality, through theatricality.

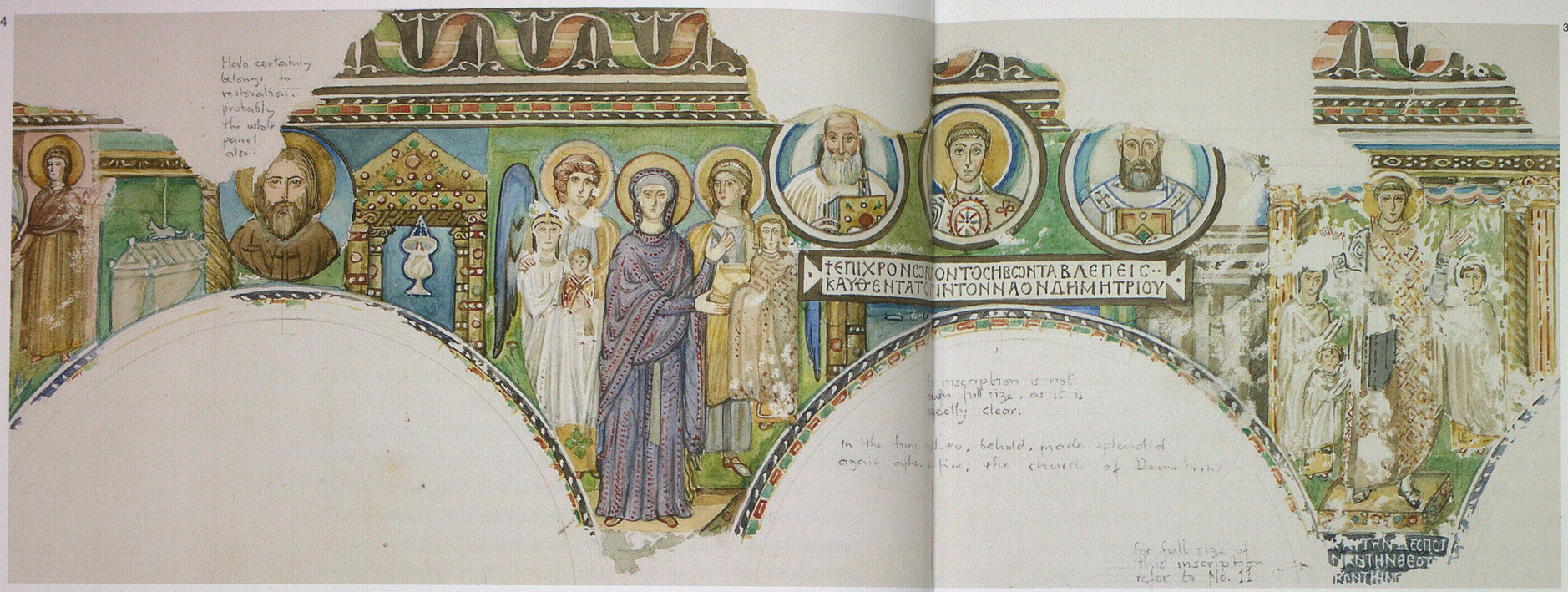
The saint's face, shoulders and torso are frontal, while his legs turn to the right, towards the young mother, and he places his right hand on the shoulder of Maria, an infant in her mother's embrace.

The young woman is in opulent raiment, with a gold diadem on her head and a flimsy veil covering her face. She bows in front of St Demetrios. Top right, in a circular opening of heaven, Christ appears in the type of the Pantocrator. His right hand, outside the frame, is extended towards the raised hand of St Demetrios, transmitting to him the grace of benefaction. Present in the scene is a haloed female figure wearing brightly coloured garments and red shoes. She comes out of a building housing a marble sarcophagus. Justifiable reservations have been expressed regarding the identification of this figure as the Virgin.[44] In my opinion some other female saint of Maria's family is depicted, or a protectress of children, who comes out of her church, in which her tomb is shown. Is it perhaps St Matrona, who in the previous panel accompanied Maria's pregnant mother. If this hypothesis is correct, then depicted in the representation are the luxurious church of St Matrona and her tomb, which I believe were located at the Heptapyrgion in Thessaloniki.

Second episode. It occupies half the fifth and half the sixth arch. The second episode is separated from the first by an elliptical medallion with a male figure in bust (Christ? St John the Baptist?) and is a later addition.[45] The second episode begins with the depiction of an opulent tetrastyle building, the decoration of which imitates baldachins in the Rotunda mosaics. Inside the building is a hanging glass lamp with burning flame. Principal figure in the second episode, coinciding with the axis of the fifth column, is not St Demetrios but the Virgin. She is depicted standing, pointing with one hand and looking to the right, and raising the other hand in supplication. Does she point to the holy bema of the basilica of St Demetrios or address the figure that was depicted at the end of the episode, inside a medallion? This central medallion has not survived, because it was replaced later by three medallions and one inscription (see below no. 11).

As in the representation in the second panel, two angels accompany the Virgin and place their hand on the shoulders of two approaching figures. On the left is the mother with Maria as an infant in her arms. Mother and daughter are most luxuriously dressed: for example, the cloth-of-gold hem of the young woman's cloth-of-silver chiton is embroidered with a quatrefoil in green thread. The woman comes out of the tetrastyle building, which implies her house.

A male figure, Maria's father, likewise luxuriously attired with cloth-of-silver himation embellished with red gems and cloth-of-gold chiton, has most probably come out of a similar building –now lost–



30. Left: third panel, the second episode in the story of the child Maria, featuring Maria in her mother's embrace, the Virgin with two angels, and Maria's father. In the middle: a later addition. Three medallions and an inscription (see fig. 53). Right: third panel, the third episode in the story of the child Maria, featuring St Demetrios in front of the holy bema of the basilica, Maria and her mother holding candles, a third female figure coming towards them. Below is the inscription: 'καὶ τὴν Δέσποιναν τὴν Θεοτόκον τὴν ἁγίαν' (and the Mistress the holy Theotokos).

31. Third panel, the second episode in the story of the child Maria. Maria in her mother's embrace, the Virgin with two angels, and Maria's father (photo. W.S. George).

and is depicted on the Virgin's right, as if hovering in space. His left leg is outside the frame of the representation, creating the sense that he is less intensely involved in the event depicted.

Third episode. It occupies half the sixth and half the seventh arch. Central figure in the episode, on the axis of the sixth column, is St Demetrios, who steps on a footstool, in front of a tetrastyle building, the two front columns of which have inlaid decoration in the flutes, while the two back ones are twisted. The columns uphold a flat roof, the cornice of which has champlevé decoration with inlaid precious stones. The back of the building is closed by a curtain which hangs from rings beneath the cornice. In the background right, in monochrome, is a five-arched double colonnade with vault. Above is a medallion with an unidentified female saint. To the left, also in monochrome, is a row of piers with triple epistyle. A medallion with the figure of a male or a female saint will have existed here, for balance. In the view of Ch. Diehl, the monochromy of the lateral buildings indicates depth and in these buildings he recognized the basilica of St Demetrios, in longitudinal section at the level of the transept.[46] According to this view, St Demetrios stands not in front of his hexagonal baldachin but in front of the four-columned baldachin of the holy bema of the basilica.

Walking towards St Demetrios are three female figures. From

the left, the young mother and Maria, both holding candles in each hand, like the candles known to have been offered to the baldachin of St Demetrios (*Miracles* I, 7, 64). Approaching from the right is a third female figure (of the same family?) with red shoes. The folds of her luxurious raiment suggest slight movement.

Preserved in the lower part of the representation, at the springing of the two arches, is the inscription *[καὶ] τὴν [Δ]έσποι/ναν τὴν Θεοτ[ό]/[κ]ον τὴν ἁγ[ίαν]* (and the Mistress the holy Theotokos). Because the text of the inscription starts with the conjunction '*καὶ*' (and), it is surmised that it is the continuation of inscriptions in the first and second episodes, which have not survived.

Fourth episode. It occupies half the seventh and the greater part of the eighth arch. The fourth episode is separated from the third by a medallion with the figure of Christ. The story closes with Maria as a child, heading a procession advancing towards St Demetrios, offering to him a pair of doves. She wears a white chiton with cloth-of-gold hem and a dark cowl covers her head. She is accompanied by her parents and two women. Her mother bends over to touch the girl's shoulder. Her father and two women bow their head. The sense of departure is heightened by the position of Maria's right foot, outside the frame of the scene. St Demetrios stands in the first intercolumniation and with his right hand points the way to the holy bema of the basilica.

31



32



33



The colonnade divides the scene into two parts. On the left is a verdant meadow with flowers and bushes. In the background are rocks. Behind the procession is a quadrilateral marble canopy. On the right the atmosphere is different. There is profuse vegetation and at the right edge a fountain. The scene is devoid of human figures, excepting a floating medallion with representation of the Virgin (?). Does the colonnade perhaps separate life here on earth from life there in paradise, and the story of Maria end with her death?

In the lower part of the representation, on the axis of the seventh column and at the springing of the seventh and the eighth arch, is the inscription *†Καὶ σὺ δέσποτά μο[υ] / ἅγιε Διμήτρι βοήθι ἡμῖν / τοῖς δούλοις σου καὶ / τῇ δούλῃ σου Μαρί/ᾳ ἣν ἔδωκες / ἡμῖν† †* (And you my master St Demetrios help us your servants and your servant Maria, whom you gave to us). On either side of the first of the two crosses at the end of the inscription are two heraldic doves. On the basis of the meaning of the inscription, P. Papageorgiou considers the offering of the pair of doves occasioned by a birth.[47]

The luxurious raiment of Maria and her parents, the jewellery, the diadems and the aura around their persons, the position and extent of the mosaics all attest that the donors were royalty or aristocrats, who keep their anonymity.[48] The continuous relationship of Maria, her parents and her family with the Virgin and St Demetrios, the thanks and the invocations, and the cross marked on the forehead bespeak the fact that Maria and her parents had received their beneficial intervention, perhaps even before her birth.

d. Fourth panel: Donors thank St Demetrios

It occupies part of the eighth and part of the ninth arch. The panel is surrounded by a frame almost the same as that of the second panel. On the axis of the eighth column, St Demetrios stands on a suppedaneum in front of a tetrastyle porch with conch, at the entrance to a building implying his church. The semi-dome of the conch is adorned with a cockleshell. The entrance is covered by a green arras. The cornice is decorated with a cymatium and precious stones. In the open parts of the building three men appear and approach, hovering as in the first panel. They are opulently attired and in a pose of gratitude. The feet of two figures are outside the panel's frame.

The youngest man, with arms bare, touches exceptionally the saint's garment. The inscription *Ὑπ[ὲρ ε]/ὐχῆ[ς ο]/ὗ οἶδ[εν] / ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς [τὸ] ὄνο[μα]/†* (Prayer on behalf of him whose name God knows) concerns all three men. On the front of the propylon, in concave medallions are two relief figures of saints.[49]

W.S. George observed and drew a crack running through the upper part of the mosaics. R. Cormack (1969), following W.S. George, expressed the view that the mosaics on the north small colonnade belong to two periods.[50] The lower, main and larger part of the mosaics dates to the period before the fire in the basilica and displays unity in style and execution.

Despite the stylistic similarities to the mosaic no. 1, in which the earlier marble baldachin is depicted, the mosaics on the north colonnade were made after the marble baldachin was replaced by the silver one, possibly in the reign of Justinian I (527-565). In terms of style and iconography, the mosaics of the north colonnade were the source on which drew the craftsman who executed the mosaic in the amphitheatre of Dyrrhachium, which is dated after the 522 earthquake.[51]

The upper part of the mosaics was destroyed in the fire and was restored with repairs which are of inferior artistic quality, using tesserae of different composition and colour, but following the original design and restoring the original representations with continuity of lines and conscientious continuation of the drawing.[52]

R. Cormack includes in the same activity other minor repairs to the main part of the mosaics (the face of the female saint in the first episode of the child Maria, the elliptical medallion at the beginning of the second episode, the face of an angel in the second episode, the east edge of the fourth panel after a vertical crack). He correlates chronologically all the repairs with the addition, on the front of the sixth arch of the colonnade, of three medallions and an inscription referring to the destruction and the renovation of the basilica (see below no. 11).

Nonetheless, the spirit of the addition that destroyed existing mosaics of donors is at variance with the careful repairs that simply fill in, albeit artlessly, the original representations. If the wide bichrome band that runs round the mosaics, above the panels, also belongs to the second period, then these are not repairs and completions but large-scale interventions and completions to the surface of the mosaics. It is difficult to maintain that all these interventions date to the same period, especially when the observations are made on the basis of drawings.

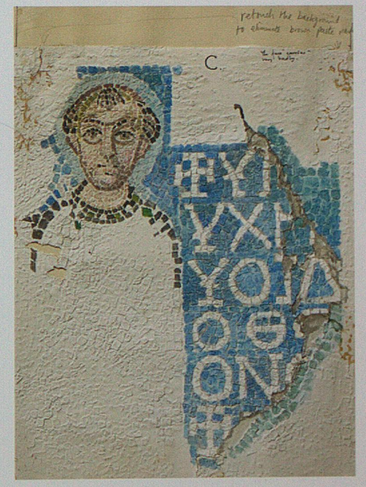
Notwithstanding W.S. George's oral remarks, as recorded by O. Dalton,[53] in my view it is not unlikely that the cracks in the tessellated surface are related to subsidence of the colonnade, at some

32. St Demetrios from the fourth panel of the mosaics on the north small colonnade (now in the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki).

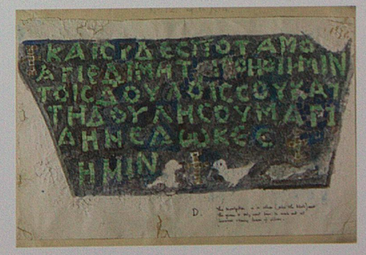
33-34. Fourth panel: Three donors thank St Demetrios, shown in front of an alcove with tetrastyle propylon of his church. On the front of the propylon, in concave medallions, are two figures of male saints. The inscription: '†Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς οὗ οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα' (Prayer on behalf of him whose name God knows).

35. Third panel, fourth episode. The inscription on the axis of the seventh column '†Καὶ σὺ δὲσποτά μου ἅγιε Διμήτρι βοήθι ἡμῖν τοῖς δούλοις σου καὶ τῇ δούλῃ σου Μαρίᾳ ἣν ἔδωκες ἡμῖν††' (And you my master St Demetrios help us your servants and your servant Maria, whom you gave to us).

34



35



time unknown, and the repairs made in various periods, even before the renovation in 620. P. Papageorgiou notes that the columns bent dangerously to the east and the colonnade as a whole to the north.[54]

Three mosaics adorn the northwest pier of the holy bema. They are considered to belong to the second building period of the basilica.

4. ST GEORGE WITH TWO CHILDREN

Depicted in the mosaic of the west side, where the north colonnade ends, is a soldier-saint in formal uniform, with two children of different age.[55] They wear a white chiton and a chlamys with tablion, sign of aristocratic origin.

The subject and the exact meaning of the representation elude us, because the inscription that existed below the mosaic has not survived. The pose of the saint, who lays his left hand on the shoulder of the elder child and prays with his right hand on their behalf, leaves no doubt that the two children are under his protection.

A painted inscription between the mosaic and the marble cornice, *Ὁ ἅγιος Γεώργις*, confirms that the saint with the bushy red hair is neither St Demetrios nor St Bacchos, as has been proposed, but St George, and that this is one of the earliest depictions of the popular saint in monumental painting.[56] Consequently, in terms of iconography, children do not accompany exclusively representations of St Demetrios, as we used to believe. Nor do they appear in the iconography of St George. In my view they are a characteristic of the basilica of St Demetrios, related to the therapeutic process in the *xenon* (hospital).

Judging by the conspicuous presence of children and female saints in the historiation of the basilica, the *xenon* of St Demetrios seems to have specialized in paediatric and obstetric cases, and the role of the Virgin was important. The specialization of hospitals in Early Christian times was not unknown.[57]

36



36. The mosaic 'St George with two children' is one of the earliest depictions of the popular saint with red bushy hair. He wears formal military uniform with clavus. With one hand he touches the shoulder of the elder child and prays for them both. A painted inscription 'Ὁ ἅγιος Γεώργις' above the mosaic confirms the identity of the saint.

37-38. Portraits of the two children from the mosaic 'St George with two children (see fig. 36). Their attire denotes their noble origin. Their depiction with St George on a pier next to the sanctuary of the basilica of St Demetrios is associated with the operation of a hospice-hospital where St Demetrios, the Virgin, St George and other saints effected miraculous cures.

39. The face of St George from the mosaic 'St George with two children' (see fig. 36). The presence of St George and other soldier-saints in the basilica of St Demetrios attests that the patron saint of Thessaloniki saved his city with the help of fellow champions of the faith.

37



38



39



40. The sweetness of the Virgin's face is rendered in shades of rose pink (see fig. 42).

41. The military saint Theodore is depicted with black hair and a long black pointed beard (see fig. 42).

42. The mosaic ' The Virgin and St Theodore'. St Theodore supplicates in an archaist manner and the Virgin turns to the right in front of the walls of Thessaloniki. He holds a scroll with the inscription: 'Δέησις. Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς εἰσάκουσον τῆς φωνῆς τῆς δεήσεώς μου ὅτι ὑπὲρ τοῦ κόσμου δέομαι' (Prayer. Lord may God hear the voice of my prayer that I pray on behalf of the world). The donor addresses thanks to the Virgin through the founder inscription: '...πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ἀπελπισθεὶς παρὰ δὲ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως ζωοποιηθεὶς εὐχαριστῶν ἀνεθέμην' (disheartened by all 'men' but vitalized by your power, in gratitude I dedicated).

40



41



5. THE VIRGIN AND ST THEODORE

The mosaic is on the south side of the pier towards the holy bema. The two figures differ in iconography and style. The saint with the black hair and the pointed black beard is St Theodore, another soldier-saint who is depicted immobile, frontal and orans, in an archaizing manner, like the saint with the same characteristics in the second panel of mosaics on the north small colonnade. On the contrary, the Virgin, as also in the mosaics of the north small colonnade, is different. She turns to the right, her body is rendered with slight plasticity and the sweetness of her face in shades of pink, under the drapery of the maphorion. For this reason the figure was dated in the ninth century, after Iconoclasm.[58] She holds a scroll in which is written: *Δέησις / Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς / εἰσάκου/σον τῆς / φωνῆς τῆς / δαιήσεώς μου ὅτι ὑ/πὲρ τοῦ κόσ/μου δέο/με* (Prayer. Lord the God hear the voice of my supplication that I pray on behalf of the world). The supplication is addressed to Christ Pantocrator, who appears in the white segment of heaven and outstretches his right hand towards the Virgin, receiving her intercession. Beams of light radiate from heaven. The two figures stand outside a high building (defensive wall?) with a tall, narrow gate in the middle and a corbel on the left. The upper structure of the building is adorned with cymatium and cornice, where motifs are discernible on red ground.

The donor addresses thanks to the Virgin through the donor inscription: *...π]ᾶσιν ἀνθρόποις ἀπελπισθεὶς παρὰ δὲ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως ζωοποιηθὴς εὐχαριστῶν ἀνεθέμην* (disheartened by all 'men' but vitalized by your power, in gratitude I dedicated).[59] If the word '*ἀνθρώποις*' (men) means the physicians, there is no reason not to associate this mosaic too with the donor's cure, not by St Demetrios but by the Virgin. If the marble arch with the founder inscription of the *παγκλεοῦς Θεοδώρου* (most glorified Theodore), which comes from the baldachin of the altar table of the basilica, is dated in the ninth century, as G. Velenis supposed,[60] then the mosaic with the representation of St Theodore, located opposite the altar table, was perhaps an *ex-voto* of the same person, because he was cured by the grace of the Virgin, after unsuccessful efforts by the physicians.

42



43, 45. On the west side of the south pier, the mosaic 'St Sergius'. Captain of the imperial guard, Sergius was honoured in the East and particularly in Syria, where he was martyred. With the eponymous depiction of him in the basilica of St Demetrios, his origin from Thessaloniki is claimed and he is counted among the fellow soldier-saints of Demetrios.

44. The mosaic 'St Nestor'. The inscription '†Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς οὗ οἶδεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα' (Prayer on behalf of him whose name God knows) attests that the mosaic was dedicated in gratitude for a benefaction.

43



6. ST NESTOR

Depicted on the east side of the same pier is an orant saint in formal attire.[61] The central part of the mosaic, together with part of the face, are destroyed. Nonetheless, discernible are the triangular shape of the face, the short hair, the narrow forehead, the long nose and the almond-shaped eyes. From the iconographic type of the orant saint and the surviving gold palm of his right hand, it is deduced that the depiction follows the model of an earlier image. The saint stands in front of a high building (defensive wall?), behind which is a green arras hanging from the frame of the mosaic.

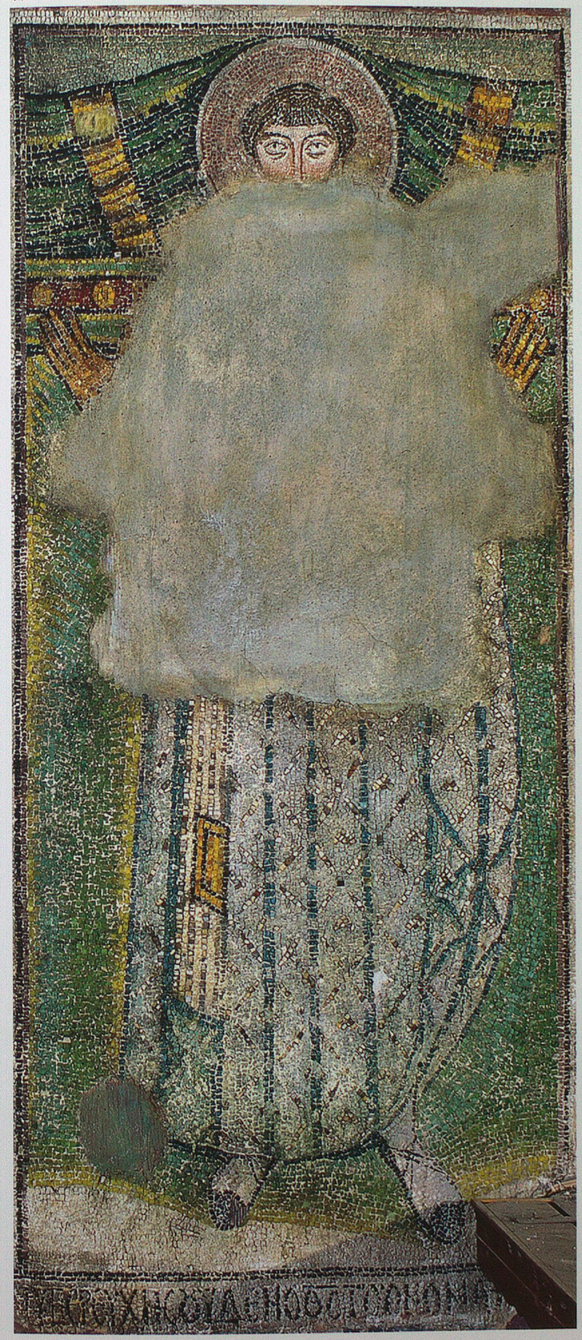
The inscription †*Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς οὗ (ο)ἶδεν ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τὸ ὄνομα*† (Prayer on behalf of him whose name God knows) attests that the mosaic is of votive character and was dedicated in gratitude. Although it has been suggested that the figure is of St Demetrios, the portrait features prompt other thoughts on its identity, the probability of which is reinforced by the fact that St George and St Theodore are depicted on the other two sides of the same pier. Consequently, other soldier-saints, companions of St Demetrios, are candidates for identification. The most likely is St Nestor, judging by the triangular shape of the face and the short hair, as he is represented on a lead myrrh ampulla *(koutrouvion)* in the Louvre, or by the long nose, as he appears on the casket in the Vatopedi monastery.[62] The embroidery on the chiton, the patterns on the chlamys, and the gold palms resemble those of the first saint in the first panel of the mosaics on the north small colonnade, whose face has not survived (see above no. 3a). Both mosaics seem to be related to each other and perhaps the mosaic on the northwest pier copies that on the north small colonnade.

It is dated to the seventh-eighth century.

7. ST SERGIUS

On the west side of the south pier, in corresponding position to the representation of St George on the north pier, St Sergius is depicted in orant pose.[63] He wears a red chiton and a white, lavishly decorated chlamys with red tablion and red embroidered rosettes and trefoils. His face is framed by his bushy hair, as in the icon of him with St Bacchus, in the Sinai monastery. Around his neck is the *maniakion*, a kind of gold necklace denoting high military office. St Sergius was *primikerios* of the School of *Gentelii*, that is, head of the imperial guard, and is honoured as famed defender of Christ in the East, particularly in Syria. The saint stands in front of a wall

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with walkway. Behind it is a light-blue arras with gold bands, hanging from the frame of the image, as in the mosaic of St George.

In the sky there is the inscription *† Ὁ ἅγιος Σέργις*, contemporary with the mosaic. This means that it had to be specified that the saint depicted is Sergius and not some other. Through his image the Thessaloniki Church claimed his close relationship with the city of St Demetrios.[64] In the Martyrologion of St Sergius the city in which he spent his military career and his martyrdom began is not named. It is deduced from the narrative in general that this was the capital of the king Maximianus, with a palace, an agora and a temple of Zeus. These elements do not rule out Thessaloniki, particularly if the king Maximianus of the martyrologion is identified with Galerius (augustus 305-311, with Thessaloniki as his seat). If this view is correct, then St Sergius is counted among the soldiers serving together with Demetrios.

8. SAINT IN BUST

Depicted in bust in the semi-dome of a small conch in the north wall of the south wing is a beardless saint (St Demetrios?), in frontal pose and orans.[65] All that survives of his face is the chin. He wears a chiton embroidered on the shoulder and a white chlamys with red tablion. Behind him is a building with white cornice, and green ground. Below, there is an inscription in white letters on a black band, '*…ον καὶ τῆς συμβίου αὐτοῦ Ἰω…*' (ou … and his wife Io…). Its content confirms its votive character.

It is dated to the seventh century.

If the mosaics on the north pier, the north aisle and the west wall relate to the salvation of men, the mosaics on the south pier relate to the salvation of the city and its representatives. I characterize the next three mosaics as founder ones *(ktetorika)*.

9. ST DEMETRIOS WITH THE FOUNDERS OF THE BASILICA

On the north side of the south pier, towards the holy bema, St Demetrios is depicted wearing a golden yellow chiton and a white embroidered chlamys with red tablion.[66] In a gesture of favour and protection he lays his hands on the shoulders of two figures, to right and left of him: the Archbishop of Thessaloniki and the Eparch. The first figure holds in his hands, which are covered by his white omophorion, a Gospel-book with precious binding, and the second, in cloth-of-gold uniform, holds in his right hand the *apokombion*

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46. The face of St Sergius is framed by bushy hair (see fig. 45). Around his neck is the *maniakion*, a torque indicative of high military rank.

with money and in the left the sceptre of his office. The three figures stand in front of the walls of Thessaloniki. The faces of the two officials are projected against two battlements. St Demetrios' gold halo is framed by the green arras, as it covers the crenellations of the walls. The linear rendering and the sharp contrast of light and shade in the drapery of the garments impart a sense of volume and relief to the figures. This sense is counteracted by the decorative embroidery of St Demetrios' chlamys, which is developed independently of the drapery. The composition is balanced by the reverse perspective: St Demetrios is behind his protégés, yet he is higher. In this way the figures seem to come out of the pier.

The inscription justifies the presence of St Demetrios between the city's two most important officials: *† Κτίστας θεωρεῖς τοῦ πανενδόξου δόμου ἐκεῖθεν ἔνθεν μάρτυρος Δημητρίου / τοῦ βάρβαρον κλύδωνα βαρβάρων στόλῳ μετατρέποντος καὶ πόλιν λυτρουμένου †* (You see the 'founders' of the all glorious church on the one and the other side of the martyr Demetrios, who with his fleet turned back the barbarous tempest of barbarians and liberated the city).[67] It is not clear from the word '*κτίστας*' (founders) whether the depicted Eparch and Archbishop are the founders or the renovators of the basilica. Th. Uspenskij and Ch. Diehl support the view that depicted are the donors of the two periods, that is, the founder Eparch Leontios and the renovator Archbishop of Thessaloniki.[68] The use of the phrase '*ἐκεῖθεν ἔνθεν*' (on the one and the other side) permits such a chronological transfer. The verb '*θεωρεῖς*' synchronizes their presence with St Demetrios at the time when he saved the city not only from the siege by the Slavs in the dug-out canoes (*Miracles* II, 1 in 615) but also with the attacks in general by Avars and Slavs (*βάρβαρον κλύδωνα βαρβάρων* = barbarian tempest of barbarians) including also the great siege (*Miracles* II, 2 in 618), which followed.[69] An analogous example of transposition is the renowned mosaic in the Hagia Sophia church at Constantinople, *circa* 1000, which depicts Constantine the Great (324-337) and Justinian I (527-565) to right and left of the Virgin. The composer of the inscription used the word '*στόλῳ*' (fleet instead of the word 'στρατῷ' (army), which is more or less synonymous,[70] for metrical reasons, because the text 'is absolutely disciplined to the canons of the iambic trimetre'. '*Ὁ τοῦ ἀθλοφόρου στρατός*' (The army of the victorious one) is not unknown. It is mentioned in the *Miracles* (I, 12, 108) as his '*ἀόρατος στρατός*' (invisible army) (*Miracles* I, 14, 161), because in my opinion in this participated other soldier-saints who are honoured by their depic-

47. The mosaic 'St Demetrios with the builders of the basilica'. In front of the walls of Thessaloniki and as a gesture of favour and protection, the patron saint places his hands on the shoulders of the renovator of the basilica, Archbishop of Thessaloniki, on his right, and the founder of the basilica, Eparch of Illyricum Leontius, on his left (see fig. 1). The inscription 'Κτίστας θεωρεῖς τοῦ πανενδόξου δόμου ἐκεῖθεν ἔνθεν μάρτυρος Δημητρίου, τοῦ βάρβαρον κλύδωνα βαρβάρων στόλω μετατρέποντος καὶ πόλιν λυτρουμένου' (You see the 'founders' of the all glorious church on the one and the other side of the martyr Demetrios, who with his fleet turned back the barbarous tempest of barbarians and liberated the city) refers to the salvation of the city from the attacks by Avars and Slavs in the late sixth and the early seventh century, by St Demetrios and the army of his fellow soldier-saints who are depicted in the mosaics of the basilica.

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48. Two founder mosaics on the south pier of the holy bema, the inscription reading as one: 'St Demetrios with the builders of the basilica', right, and 'St Demetrios with the deacon', left.

49. The mosaic 'St Demetrios and the deacon'. The patron saint of Thessaloniki (see fig. 2) stands beside an elderly deacon in front of the walls of the city. This is the man to whom St Demetrios was constantly appearing and who had undertaken supervision of restoration works on the basilica in the early seventh century. His off-white monochrome sticharion is rendered like the shaft of a marble column. He is the composer of certain chapters of the *Miracles of St Demetrios*, the book of which he holds in his hands. His right hand, in a gesture of welcome and proskynesis points to the inscription 'Πανόλβιε Χριστοῦ μάρτυς φιλόπολις φροντίδα τίθη καὶ πολιτῶν καὶ ξένων' (Most felicitous martyr of Christ take care of the citizens and the strangers) who participated in the restoration of the basilica.

48



tion in the mosaics in the church, together with whom St Demetrios worked for the salvation of the city.[71] In my view, this is the '*στόλος*' of the inscription.

10. ST DEMETRIOS AND THE DEACON

The mosaic with St Demetrios standing beside an elderly deacon in front of the walls of Thessaloniki forms a unit with the previous one, as Th. Papazotos demonstrated.[72] The saint, wearing a white chiton and a white chlamys with blue tablion, raises his left hand in front on the chest in supplication and places his right hand familiarly on the deacon's shoulder. The deacon, in frontal pose and vested in an off-white monochrome sticharion and gold-embellished orarion, with reserved turn towards St Demetrios, holds in his left hand a closed codex with precious binding and outstretches his right in a gesture of welcome and proskynesis. His face is projected against a battlement of the wall, which is covered by a green arras. He has strong facial features.

G. and M. Soteriou, relying on the remarks of O. Tafrali, identified the deacon with the *ἄξιον ἄνδρα, τὸν γνησίως ὑπουργοῦντα τὸν πανύμνητον μάρτυρα* (worthy man, he who genuinely served the all-hymned martyr) (*Miracles* II, 3, 226-227), to whom it was said that St Demetrios *διηνεκῶς ὠπτάνετο* (was continually appearing) and whom St Demetrios called 'brother'.[73] Through this man, St Demetrios' opinion on the destruction and the reconstruction of his house was made known, and this man undertook supervision of the works. That is why his figure is depicted as a perfect marble column, like a herm. The deacon supplicates to the patron saint to take care of the citizens and the foreigners who formed the workforce that brought to pass the restoration of the basilica of St Demetrios: *† Πανόλβιαι Χριστοῦ μάρτυς φιλόπολις / φροντίδα τίθη καὶ πολιτῶν καὶ ξένων* (Most felicitous martyr of Christ, take care of the citizens and the strangers) is written in the inscription of the mosaic, to which the deacon points with his hand.

Expressions in paragraphs 226-227 of the *Miracles* refer in their wording as well as their spirit to the inscriptions that are associated with the destruction by fire and the reconstruction of the church. I have argued elsewhere that the composer of the inscriptions and of the first three chapters of the Second *Book of the Miracles* is the deacon depicted (see also below no. 11).[74] Could it be that the book with precious binding, which he holds in his left hand under the orarion, is not a Gospel-book but the book of the *Miracles of St Demetrios*?

49



50. St Sergius' white elaborately decorated chlamys with red clavus (see fig. 45). The embroidered rosettes and trefoils are developed independently of the drapery of the chlamys.

51. The severity of the drapery of the omophorion of the archbishop on the left is in keeping with the respect with which he holds the Gospel-book in his covered hands. Right, the cloth-of-gold costume, the staff of secular authority and the coin-filled purse (apokombion) of the Eparch of Illyricum Leontius, who founded the basilica of St Demetrios (see fig. 47).

52. The elaborately decorated chlamys of St Demetrios, the sticharion and the orarion of the deacon, and the Book of *Miracles of St Demetrios* (see fig. 49). St Demetrios' hand in a gesture of affirmation and conversation. The deacon's hand in a gesture of welcome and proskynesis.

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11. THREE MEDALLIONS AND ONE INSCRIPTION ON THE NORTH SMALL COLONNADE

The later addition to the mosaics of the north small colonnade, on the front of the eighth arch and opposite the middle intercolumniation of the north central colonnade, is related, I would say, to the two donor-founder mosaics.[75] As we have said, the addition concerns an inscription referring to the destruction by fire and the restoration of the church (around 620, according to P. Lemerle) and three medallions with the figures of St Demetrios and two clerics. The cleric on the left of St Demetrios, towards the holy bema, has the same portrait features as the Archbishop in the mosaic of the donors-founders[76]. The cleric on the right of St Demetrios wears an orarion and resembles the deacon in the previous mosaic, slightly older in the view of G. Soteriou. That is, we have here the presence of two clerics who were involved in the renovation of the basilica of St Demetrios.[77] The saint's white chlamys has on the chest a six-rayed star embroidered in red thread, and trefoils. St Sergius and St Demetrios wear the same chlamys in the mosaic of the four clerics (see below no. 12). It is tempting to suggest that the head of St Demetrios was removed from the mosaic of the four clerics and placed in the mosaic described here, given that the calculation of their dimensions does not preclude this.

The inscription in a iambic distich reads: *†Ἐπὶ χρόνων Λέοντος ἡβῶντα βλέπεις / καυθέντα τὸ πρὶν τὸν ναὸν Δημητρίου* (In the years of Leo's youth you see burnt the former church of St Demetrios).[78] It refers to the destruction of the church by fire and its renovation, which is mentioned in the *Miracles* (II, 3, 224-229). This event is associated with a certain Leo (*ἐπὶ Λέοντος*). In the margin of the codex Par. Gr. 1517, which is the basic manuscript of the *Miracles of St Demetrios*, there is the note *'ἐπὶ τῶν χρόνων Λέοντος τοῦ ἐπάρχου'* (in the time of Leo the eparch).[79] I wonder whether the Leo in the inscription, the eparch

53. Three medallions and an inscription. Later addition in the middle of the third panel of the mosaics on the north small colonnade (see fig. 30). In the middle medallion St Demetrios, in the right medallion the archbishop of the mosaic of the builders (see fig. 47), in the left one the deacon of the mosaic in fig. 49. The inscription 'Ἐπὶ χρόνων Λέοντος ἡβῶντα βλέπεις καυθέντα τὸ πρὶν τὸν ναὸν Δημητρίου' (In the years of Leo's youth you see burnt the former church of St Demetrios) refers to the restoration of the basilica of St Demetrios in the early seventh century.

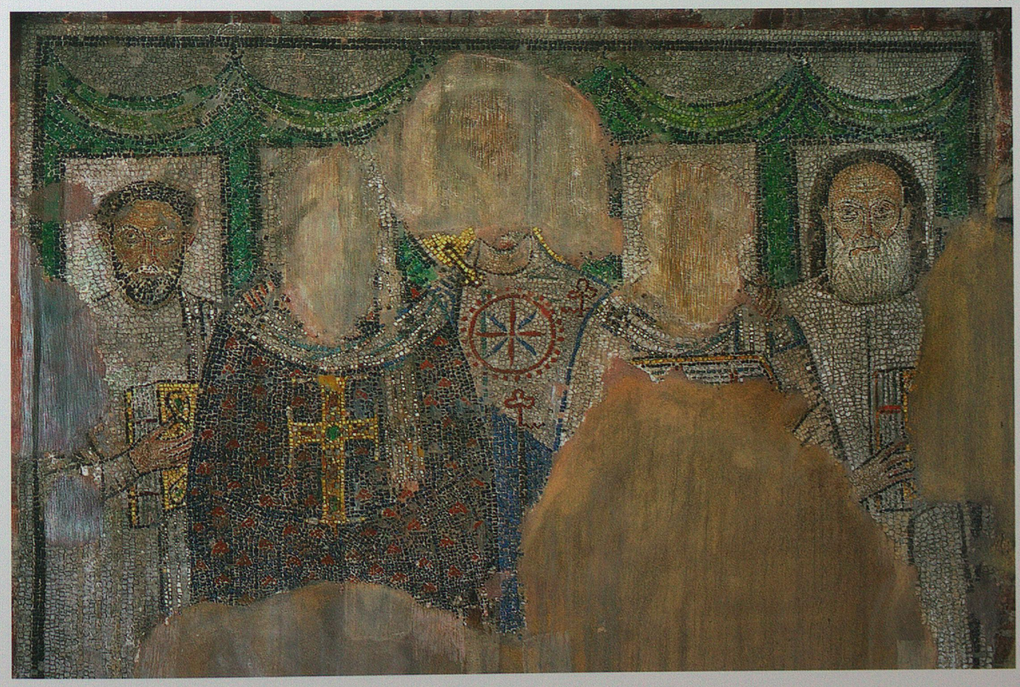
54. The mosaic 'St Demetrios with four clerics'. St Demetrios with two bishops, one presbyter, right, and one deacon, left. The faces of the three central figures have been destroyed or detached to be used in another mosaic.

Leo in the marginal note and the Eparch of Illyricum, Leontios, are not one and the same person. G. Velenis, wishing to link the founding of the basilica of St Demetrios in the mid-fifth century with Emperor Leo I (457-474) or the Pope of Rome Leo the Great (440-461), disassociated the name Leo in the inscription from the destruction and renovation of the basilica, by aptly using the linguistic phenomenon of chiasmus.[80] The same disassociation could be reached more simply through the use of the present tense of '*βλέπεις*', which is synonymous with '*θεωρεῖς*' (you see) in the inscription of the founders' mosaic. Both verbs function in the same way in terms of the transposition of time.

12. ST DEMETRIOS WITH FOUR CLERICS

On the west wall of the middle aisle is a mosaic depicting St Demetrios in the midst of four clerics.[81] The saint has his arms around the shoulders of the two bishops who stand beside him, each wearing an omophorion and holding a Gospel-book with precious binding. The faces of all three figures are destroyed.[82] At the edges of the representation are two clerics accompanying the bishops, holding closed codices in their bare hands. On the right is an elderly

54



priest with phailonion and on the left is a young deacon with sticharion and orarion. The clerics' faces are projected against square white haloes of donors or living persons associated with the church.[83] Green arrases hang from the frame of the icon.

The mosaic was brought to light in the recent restoration works on the basilica, under an old slab of the marble dado. For this reason A. Xyngopoulos speculated that it is earlier than the renovation of the church *circa* 620.[84] G. and M. Soteriou are of the opinion that the mosaic displays stylistic similarities to mosaic no. 5 and belongs to the period between the seventh and the ninth century,[85] but they do not specify whether the similarities are in keeping with the archaizing figure of St Theodore or the figure of the Virgin. The covering of the mosaic with a slab of the marble dado is related most probably to the avoidance of deliberate destruction or removal of the three figures in order to use them elsewhere.

55-57. Decorative motifs from the arches of the north small colonnade (drawings by W.S. George).

58. Decorative band that ran along the top of the mosaics of the north small colonnade (drawings by W.S. George).

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DECORATIVE MOTIFS

13. NORTH SMALL COLONNADE

W.S. George made copies of the decorative motifs on the intrados of five arches of the north small colonnade. Interlocking circles forming quatrefoils decorate the second arch. A marble kantharos and vine shoot with bunches of grapes and vine leaves is depicted on the fifth. At the apex of the arch there is an elliptical medallion with a gold cross against a light-blue ground. Leaves and fruits coming out of a basket are the subject of the sixth and eighth arches, while adorning the seventh arch are successive flowers with tall stalk and large leaves.

The decorative mosaics on the arches of the north small colonnade are contemporary with the mosaics on the front of the colonnade, except for the fifth arch, which is differentiated because of the elliptical shape of the medallion and is for this reason considered to be a seventh-century addition (see above no. 3c).

14. WEST GALLERY[86]

The tribelon of the west gallery is the provenance of a mosaic in which a phiale full of water, to which a peacock comes to quench its thirst, is executed in light-blue tesserae on the gold ground. The representation is rendered with the grace of a sketch and the gold ground diffused the light entering through the west five-lobe window.

Dated to the first period of the church.

15. WEST TRILOBE WINDOW[87]

On the intrados of the west trilobe window of the naos there were mosaics on the inside of the glass pane, and on the outside there is a painted imitation marble dado with square slabs of veined red, yellow and deep-red marble.

MIDDLE ARCH. Developed on both sides, against a gold ground, are ten pairs of silver knots with red outlines shaded by the twilight. Inside the knots are painted colourful little birds. Between the knots are green quatrefoils with silver pistil. At the apex of the arch, where the pairs of knots and the warbling birds meet, is an elliptical white ring in which a gold cross with drops is represented. Red twilight projects the cross in heaven, the spiritual light of which is rendered in four shades of light blue.

SOUTH ARCH. On the sides of the arch are two marble ribbed basins of water, standing on grass. Two old gnarled vine trunks intertwine with verdant leaves, forming on each side four eyes from which hang bunches of ripened grapes. At the apex, visible through an elliptical white ring is the blue sky with a six-rayed star from which beams silver divine light.

NORTH ARCH. The subject of the south arch is repeated but only the lower parts of the arch survive. The difference is that the marble phiale on the north side of the arch is full not of water but of red wine.

They are dated after the seventh century.

16. WEST WINDOW

Preserved in quite good condition on the intrados of the west window, above the south entrance, is a mosaic in a light-blue and white frame.[88] On a gold ground are successive rows of silver imbrications with red shadows-outlines. In their openings appear tulip flowers with light-blue core, white petals and tall stalk from which sprout long leaves. The torsion of the flowers is such that the leaves towards the interior of the church show their bright green side, while the leaves towards the twilight show their shadowed red side.

The mosaic is dated to the first period of the church.

Principal function of the basilica of St Demetrios in Early Christian times was that of a *xenon* (hospital). Subject of the mosaics is the healing of people, especially children, and the salvation of the city and the church of St Demetrios.

In the mosaics St Demetrios is presented as protagonist, vener-

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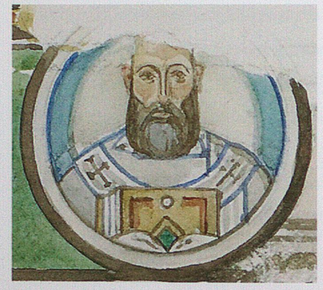


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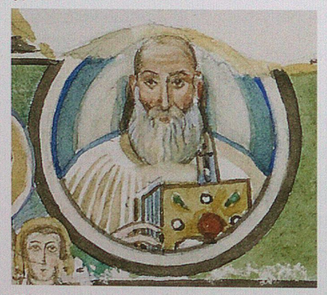


ated jointly with the Virgin and accompanied by other soldier-saints (St Nestor, St Lupus, St George, St Theodore, St Sergius), who participated in the salvation of the city as well as in curing the people, with the martyrdom of eponymous saints (St Matrona, St Pelagia, St Alexander?) and anonymous saints.

The mosaics in St Demetrios are votive images which have nothing to do with the iconographic programmes of churches. They continue the tradition of the votive iconography of the Asklepieia and the Serapeia of Antiquity, and preserve the only known illustration to date of an Early Christian *xenon*.


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59-64. Medallions from the destroyed mosaics of the north small colonnade (colour drawings by W.S. George). Depicted is St Demetrios (top right) with clerics and figures of saints who participated in the founding and restoration of his church, in the salvation of the city of Thessaloniki and the healing of its inhabitants.

NOTES

1 Skedros 1999.
2 *Miracles of St Demetrios*, 350-352.
3 Bakirtzis – Koester 1998, 41-42, fig. 6.
4 *Miracles of St Demetrios*, 354-356. The historical value of the Lives (*Vitae*) of the saints in general is today being re-examined positively.
5 Pelekanidis 1970, 303-316.
6 The views concerning Sirmion have been challenged by St. Pelekanidis 1970, G. Theocharides 1980, 59-82, and J. Skedros 1999, 11-40, who support the view of O. Tafrali 1919, 65, that these are two different saints of the same name, whose cults overlap.
7 Mentzos 2001, 245. Velenis 2003, 42.
8 Soteriou 1952, 246-247.
9 Spieser 1992, 569.
10 Lemerle 1979-1981, 110.
11 Pallas 1979, 44-58.
12 Bakirtzis 2002, 181.
13 Papadopoulos 1971. Obolensky 1974.
14 *Miracles of St Demetrios,* 368-371. Bakirtzis 2010, 402-409. Ch. Bakirtzis, Ο ξενών του Αγίου Δημητρίου: εικονογραφικά ζητήματα, International Congress, 'The Medicine in the Ancient Mediterranean World', Nicosia, Cyprus 2008 (proceedings in press).
15 Mentzos 1994, 94.
16 Bakirtzis 2008, 178.
17 Papageorgiou 1908, 335-336. Bakirtzis 2001, 191-197.
18 *Miracles of St Demetrios*, 517-525.
19 Spieser 1984, 182-184.
20 Spieser 1984, 205-208.
21 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1980a, 78-106.
22 Soteriou 1952, 187. Xyngopoulos 1946, 32. Xyngopoulos 1969, 12. Bakirtzis 1998, 47. Cormack 1985a, 90. Mentzos 2010.
23 *Miracles of St Demetrios*, 14-15.
24 Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 95.
25 Soteriou 1952, 192-193.
26 An appliqué of cloth denoting rank.
27 For the iconographic types of St Demetrios see Bakirtzis 2007.
28 Grabar 1946, 89: house or porch of a church?
29 Soteriou 1952, 191.
30 Mentzos 1994, 93.
31 Cormack 1985a. Mavropolou-Tsioumi 2009, 151-158. Coloured drawings of the mosaics were made also by M. Le Tourneau (Diehl – Le Tourneau 1910, pl. XVI), and the painter C. Maleas.
32 Peshlow 2006, 60.
33 Xyngopoulos 1950, 20-25. The correlation with the co-worship of Serapis and Isis in the Serapeion at Thessaloniki is tempting (Bakirtzis 2010, 407).
34 R. Cormack 1969, 24, sees St Demetrios in both but the portrait features in the second figure permit differentiations.
35 See drawing of the marble baldachin in Bakirtzis 2002, fig. 2.
36 Grabar 1950, 25.
37 Diehl – Le Tourneau 1910, 229. I note the similarity to Serapis.
38 This is the only bearded figure among the men depicted in the mosaics in the basilica of St Demetrios. For this reason A. Grabar 1946, 96, considered that this figure was an addition made after the reign of Herakleios.
39 Cormack 1969, 29.
40 Ch. Diehl – M. Le Tourneau 1910, 230, describe the figure as genuflecting.
41 Ch. Diehl – M. Le Tourneau 1910, 230.
42 Grabar 1946, 99.
43 Cormack 1969, 28-29.
44 R.F. Hoddinott 1963, 148-149, identifies the female figure with the personification of Eutaxy (= Good Order) (*Miracles of St Demetrios* I, 10, 88-91).
45 Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 99. Cormack 1969, 34.
46 Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 100.
47 Papageorgiou 1908, 347.
48 Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1910, 235.
49 Right *ὁ ἅγι[ος Ἀλέξα]νδρος* [St Alexander] (Cormack 1985a, fig. 39) or *Ὁ ἅγι[ος Ἑλλά]διος* [St Helladios] (Papageorgiou 1908, 347) or *Ὁ ἅγι[ος Δαμι]ανός* [St Damianos] (Diehl – Le Tourneau 1910, 235, pl. XIX:1).
50 Cormack 1969, 22.
51 Cormack 1985a, 84, fig. 24.
52 Not always, as e.g. at the top of the ceiling of the silver baldachin (Cormack 1969, 33). G. Soteriou 1952, 190, associates the addition of the mosaics with the construction of galleries in the second side aisles and the reconstruction of the wall.
53 O. Dalton 1911, 379, n. 1, observes that the crack as a dividing line between mosaics of two periods is suspicious.
54 Papageogiou 1908, 334.
55 Sotiriou 1952, 194-195. There is no agreement on the sex of the elder child, despite the observation of Ch. Diehl – M. Le Tourneau 1910, 242, that the dress of both children is male.
56 Bakirtzis 2006, 128-129.
57 The xenon of St Artemios in the church of St John the Baptist at Constantinople was specialized in andrological ailments and of St Fevronia, who was co-worshipped there, in gynaecological ones (C. Mango, On the History of the Templon and the Martyrion of St. Artemios at Constantinople, *Zograf* 10 (1979), 40-43).
58 Soteriou 1952, 195-196. Foundoulis 1991, 175-184.
59 After the cleaning and imprinting of the inscription. G. Soteriou 1952, 195, follows P. Papageorgiou 1908, 381, *'[ὁ] ἐν ἀνθρόποις ἀπελπισθείς, παρὰ δὲ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως ζωοποιηθὶς εὐχαριστῶν ἀνεθέμην*'. O. Dalton 1911, 379, n. 7, reads, on the basis of W.S. George's copy *'[...]ιων ἀνθρόποις ἀπελπισθεὶς παρὰ δὲ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως ζωοποιηθεὶς εὐχαριστῶν ἀνεθέμην*'. R. Cormack 1969, 20, n. 18, reads, also on the basis of W.S. George's drawing *'[...]ον ἀνθρόποις ἀπελπ[ισ]θεὶς παρὰ δὲ τῆς σῆ(ς) δυνάμεως ζωοποιηθεὶς εὐχαριστῶν ἀνεθέμην*'.
60 Velenis 2005, 221-226.
61 Soteriou 1952, 197.
62 Bakirtzis 1990, 142, fig. 49. Xyngopoulos 1936, figs 3 and 5.
63 Soteriou 1952, 194.
64 Bakirtzis 2006, 133.
65 Soteriou 1952, 188-189.
66 Soteriou 1952, 193-194.
67 Papageorgiou 1908, 380, read 'στόλων'. Dalton 1911, 381, n. 2, having W.S. George's notes in mind, transcribed 'ΣΤΟΛΩ'. The recent cleaning and imprinting of the mosaic confirmed the word 'ΣΤΟΛΩι'. G. Velenis 2003, 37-38, correlating «στόλῳ» with the siege of Thessaloniki from the sea (615) has not bypassed difficulties in the syntax and the interpretation of the inscription, as had been noted earlier by A. Xyngopoulos 1946, 35. Collectively Rhoby 2009, 386.
68 See collectively Papazotos 1983, 365-375.
69 Lemerle 1981, II, 94.
70 Bakirtzis 1985, 1053-1058.
71 *Miracles* II, 3, 220: *'μετὰ καὶ ἑτέρων, ὥς φασιν, ἁγίων, τῆς πόλεως τὴν σωτηρίαν ἀπεργαζόμενος*' (who works for the salvation of the city together with other, as they say, saints). The same saints are permanent companions of St Demetrios, depicted with him on his reliquaries.
72 Papazotos 1983, 365-375. Rhoby 2009, 388.
73 Soteriou 1952, 197.
74 *Miracles of St Demetrios,* 414-415.
75 Soteriou 1952, 197. Cormack 1969, 39-40.
76 Soteriou 1952, 197.
77 Tafrali 1909, 98.
78 It is kept in the Museum of the Crypt of St Demetrios.
79 Tafrali 1909, 97.
80 Velenis 2003, 38-44.
81 Soteriou 1952, 198.
82 G. and M. Soteriou 1952, 198, and A. Xyngopoulos 1969, 17, speak of intentional destruction.
83 Soteriou 1952, 198. Xyngopoulos 1969, 17.
84 Xyngopoulos 1969, 18.
85 Soteriou 1952, 198.
86 Papageorgiou 1908, 335. Soteriou 1952, 188, 199. It is in the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki.
87 Papageorgiou 1908, 334. Soteriou 1952, 73.
88 Soteriou 1952, 73, 188, fig. 75. Bakirtzis et al. 2005, 510. There is a similar subject in the mosaics of the Acheiropoietos church.

LATOMOU MONASTERY

EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU
CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

LATOMOU MONASTERY
(HOSIOS DAVID)

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

In the steep narrow streets of the Ano Polis (Upper City) of Thessaloniki, a short distance to the west of the Vlatadon monastery, in a side alley off Timotheou Street, stands a humble chapel that houses one of the most important extant mural mosaics in Early Christian art. The little church is now dedicated to the memory of Hosios David of Thessaloniki, after its consecration anew for Christian worship in 1921, since during the period of Ottoman rule it had been converted into a mosque for Muslim worship, known as the Suluca or Keramedim cami.[1] A. Xyngopoulos, who conducted historical and archaeological research on the monument in 1929, identified the chapel that had been dedicated erroneously to the memory of Hosios David,

1. Christ within a translucent sphere, victor of life and death, in the representation of the Theophany. The Lord is surrounded by the winged symbols of the evangelists.

2. Angel, symbol of Evangelist Matthew, holding a richly decorated Gospel-book. Detail of fig. 1.

3. The south side of the church with the present entrance and the wooden portico added to the monument in the 1920s.

3



2

as the katholikon of the historical Latomou or Latomon monastery, so named because of its proximity to the stone quarries (Gr. *latomeia*) in the area.[2] This monastery was dedicated to Christ the Saviour, from at least the ninth century. There is considerable information on the monument's history, from its founding until the ninth century, in a text of this period, the 'Diegesis' (Narrative) of Ignatios, prior (hegumen) of the Akapniou monastery in Thessaloniki, which echoes earlier oral tradition.[3] According to the 'Diegesis', the Christian daughter of Emperor Maximianus built on this site a *balneum* (bathhouse) and decorated it with mosaics, which she then covered with cowhide so as to conceal her conversion to Christianity. According to archaeological research, the church was built in the fifth century and was perhaps dedicated to the memory of Prophet Zechariah. It was decorated with mosaics and aniconic wall-paintings, donor of which was an anonymous lady, as is recorded in the dedicatory inscription at the base of the mosaic. In the 'Diegesis' Ignatios identifies this unknown woman as Maximianus' daughter Theodora. Presumably, during the period of Iconoclasm the mosaic in the holy bema was covered with hide and plaster, which fell away after an earthquake in the reign of Leo the Armenian (813-820), to reveal to the monk Senouphios the splendid mosaic representation of the Theophany. The renaming of the Saint Zechariah monastery as the monastery of Christ the Saviour is possibly due to this revelation.

4



4. The northeast face of the church with the recent repairs, in which the north vault of the original cross-plan building and the central dome were covered by a single roof.

5. The representation of the Theophany, as seen in a vision by Prophet Ezekiel, occupies the entire semi-vault of the conch. Christ, a youthful figure, is depicted within a mandorla held by the four symbols of the evangelists with Gospel-books in their hands and many-eyed wings, as envisioned by John in the Revelation. Below the mandorla, the four rivers of Paradise and two other figures, left Ezekiel and right a prophet or an evangelist.

ARCHITECTURE

The initial Early Christian church had the plan of a Greek cross inscribed in a square, with semicircular apse at the east end.[4] The central space was roofed by a low dome set on shallow pendentives, the arms of the cross were roofed by vaults, and the corner bays by a kind of cross-vault. The entire west part of this first building was missing already in the period when it functioned as a mosque, as it has been ascertained that the minaret was founded on the space of the original southwest bay. It seems that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some basic repairs and interventions were made, which altered the monument's original form. The arched openings to the west corner bays were walled up, as was the opening of the west arm of the cross. In the 1920s, the south wooden portico was added, the north arm of the cross and the central dome were covered by a single pitched roof, and the holy bema was covered by an independent pavilion roof. This form of roofing was kept during the extensive repairs carried out in 2002-2003, because it replaces discreetly the destroyed upper structure of the church.

THE MOSAICS

The mosaic representation of the Theophany, in the semi-dome of the sanctuary conch, dates from the Early Christian phase of the monument. In the same period, wall-paintings were executed, remnants of which survive in the bema conch and on the east vault. The subjects are geometric motifs (lozenges, octagons, spiral meander pattern and circles) and baskets with flowers and fruits.[5]

In the third quarter of the twelfth century (1160-1170), the church was decorated with wall-paintings of exceptional art, with scenes from the Dodecaorton (Cycle of Twelve Feasts).[6] Of these, the scenes of the Nativity and the Baptism are preserved on the south vault, traces from the Presentation of Christ in the Temple on the archway of the southeast bay, and of the Transfiguration below the Baptism. From the later wall-paintings of the end of the thirteenth-beginning of the fourteenth century, fragmentary remains of the Entry into Jerusalem, the Prayer on the Mount of Olives and the Virgin of the Passion are preserved on the north vault.

E. K.-N.

NOTES

1 Xyngopoulos 1920-1921, 190-194.
2 Xyngopoulos 1929a, 142-180.
3 Xyngopoulos 1929a, 172-174. Pelekanidis 1949, 48-55.
4 Tsigaridas 1987, 17-31, drawings 1-3.
5 Tsigaridas 1987, 54-55.
6 Tsigaridias 1986, 25-173.





THE MOSAIC IN THE CONCH OF THE HOLY BEMA

The mosaic pictorial decoration in the conch of the holy bema is the dedication of an anonymous lady. Judging by the quality of the work, she was apparently educated and affluent. This is a suggestive work that is both surprising and fascinating. Mature in content, the mosaic has stimulated thoughts and deliberations that have long preoccupied scholarly research.[7]

Within the difficult space of the conch, the mosaicist created two levels, the heavenly (above) and the earthly (below). Depicted in the upper level is Christ within a large circular mandorla, inside which are faint rays that seem to be illuminated by an inner light. The Lord sits upon a semicircular rainbow, as in the representation of the Ascension. He wears a deep-red chiton and a deep-blue himation. His face, youthful, beardless, calm and friendly, is surrounded by rich long hair and a cross-inscribed halo, denoting his martyrdom and sacrifice. His right hand is raised, palm open, in a gesture of triumph and imposition, and in his left hand he holds an open scroll with a text declaring his appearance on earth and the hope of salvation of the faithful through the Church:

Ἰδοὺ ὁ θ(εὸ)ς ἡμῶν, ἐφ' ᾧ ἐλπίζομεν κ(αὶ) ἠγαλ/λιώμεθα / ἐπὶ τῇ σω/τηρίᾳ ἡ/μῶν, ὅτι ἀ/νάπαυσιν / δώσει ἐπὶ / τὸν οἶκον / τοῦτον.[8]

[Behold our God in whom we hope and take delight for our salvation, because he shall give rest to this house].

The youthful figure of Christ is consistent with the Early Christian concept for his iconography, as it appears in monuments of the period.

Four winged figures, each one holding a closed and lavishly decorated Gospel-book, are depicted around the large mandorla. They are one angel with silver halo and three animals with gold haloes. Part of their body is behind the transparent mandorla, but their face, with the big expressive eyes, is turned towards the beholder. Their wings are many-eyed, as envisioned by the Evangelist John in the Revelation.[9] The positioning of these figures partially within the mandorla led to their identification as the four qualities of Christ (king, priest, man, spirit), since they are thought to be taking part in the divinity, in accordance with the interpretation of Eirenaios.[10] Usually, however, they are considered as symbols of the Evangelists, Matthew (angel), John (eagle), Mark (lion) and Luke (cow), whose work supported and spread the Christian faith.

Beneath Christ's feet are the four rivers of Paradise, flowing into one larger river in which are depicted fish and a male figure with tense countenance and movements. This figure, which is rendered in grisaille –as some figures are rendered in the Second Coming– is considered to be the personification of the River Chobar or the River Jordan. The four rivers too have been interpreted as rendering the four qualities of Christ, in accordance with Eirenaios' text, or as symbols of the Evangelists.[11]

Between the depiction of the river and the mandorla, the mosaicist placed the earthly world, in which are depicted two haloed old men dressed in chiton and himation. On the left is a standing figure with bent body and raised arms with open palms at the level of the face, obviously disturbed at the revelation of Christ's glory. Behind him is a rocky landscape ending in a triangular peak. In the landscape are deciduous trees and behind the rocks are buildings of a city. On the right, in contrast to this troubled figure, is another male figure sitting calmly and reflectively upon a rock. His right hand is brought up to his chin in a gesture of contemplation, and in the left he holds an open codex which is steadied on his knees. Highly realistic but unusual for a 'sacred' figure is the manner in which he sits, cross-legged, a pose that brings to mind statues of the Hellenistic period. Written in the codex is the text: *Πηγὴ ζωτική, δεκ(τι)κή, θρεπτικὴ / ψυχῶν πιστῶν ὁ πανέν(τι)μος / οἶ(κ)ος ο(ὗτ)ος* (Source vital, welcoming, nurturing of souls of believers this most honourable house). It refers to Christ and his house as source of life that nurtures souls. The figure, like the previous one, is projected against a rocky landscape, visible behind which is a small hut-like dwelling. Grey clouds above these figures and around the mandorla create the sense of a tranquil, peaceful space. The clouds recall the depiction of St Demetrios with the Angel, in the mosaic in the church of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki.[12]

The composition is framed by two lovely decorative zones. The zone defining the limit of the semi-dome of the conch has a light-blue ground set with polychrome precious stones, alternated squares and ovals, linked together by a gold chain, a motif encountered in the mosaics in the dome of the Rotunda, in slightly different form, as well as in sixth-century monuments.[13] In the zone defining the front of the apse, depicted against a light-blue and red ground, is a pattern of pairs of confronted swans, with a vase between them, and a green palm-like plant separating the pairs. At the midpoint of the zone is a circle inscribed with a cross, to left and right of which is a swan. The symbolic content of the subject

is clear. In the lower part of the mosaic composition there is a wide red band in which is written in silver letters the inscription:

Πηγὴ ζ(ω)τική, δεκτική, θρεπτικὴ ψυχῶν
πιστῶν ὁ πα[νέντιμος οἶ]κος οὗτος· [εὐξαμ]ένη
ἐπέτυχα καὶ ἐπιτυχο[ῦσ]α ἐπλήροσα (sic) †
† *Ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς [ἧς οἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα]*
[Source vital, welcoming, nurturing of souls
of believers this most honourable house having prayed
I succeeded and having succeeded I completed †
† Prayer of the lady whose name God knows]

The two texts, of the codex held by the sitting figure and of the dedicatory inscription, are almost identical and refer to Christ, that is, to the Church and to the church, the house of God, which gives life and nurtures the faithful. The triumphal depiction of Christ declares the presence of God (Theophany) in this house and the representation takes on an eschatological, soteriological and eucharistic content.[14]

There has been much debate about the figures depicted in the lower zone of the representation, as no names accompany them. The earlier proposed identification of these figures was based on the 'Diegesis' (Narrative) of the monk Ignatios, in which the two figures in the earthly world are identified as Ezekiel (left) and Habakkuk (right), and the representation was interpreted as the Vision of Ezekiel.[15] Ignatios' interpretation had already been repeated in a fourteenth-century icon from Poganovo (now in the Sofia Museum),[16] in which the representation in the Latomou monastery is clearly rendered and in which the names of the two prophets are written, on the basis of the 'Diegesis' of Ignatios. However, the debate continued, mainly because the figure on the right does not correspond to known depictions of the Prophet Habakkuk, or indeed to any other prophet. For this reason, although the majority of scholars agree that the Theophany, based on the Vision of Ezekiel, is depicted in the mosaic, opinions differ regarding the identification of the two figures in the earthly world.

Diverse interpretations have been proposed, backed by various arguments:[17] Ezekiel and Isaiah, Ezekiel and Zechariah, Ezekiel and the Evangelist John, Isaiah and the Evangelist John, and the Apostles Peter and Paul. Whatever the identity of the figures, the content of the representation remains the same. In my view, these figures may represent the two worlds of the Scriptures, of the Old Testament –Prophet Ezekiel, who is astonished by the vision of the future

6



6. Detail of the figure of Christ from the representation of the Theophany. Christ, youthful and amicable, with luxuriant long hair and cross-inscribed halo, emanates majesty.

7. Prophet Ezekiel, with obvious surprise and agitation, beholds the advent of Christ, which alludes to the Second Coming-Last Judgement.

8. Figure from the representation of the Theophany, usually identified as the Prophet Habakkuk but also with other persons, such as the Evangelist John.

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9. The lion, symbol of Evangelist Mark, and below it the fish-filled river and its personification. At the base of the conch is part of the dedicatory inscription ' ...ή, θρεπτικὴ ψυχῶν πιστῶν ὁ πα...'.

appearance of Christ–, and of the New Testament– most probably the Evangelist John, who, serene and mature, sees the appearance of Christ and the coming salvation.

It is not known when this mosaic was made, as no historical information exists. The dates suggested range between the early fifth and the mid-seventh century. The prevailing view is that the mosaic was executed in the fifth century and indeed in the last quarter.[18]

The dating of the mosaic in the seventh century was based on some observations on the iconographic subject and comparisons with seventh-century mosaics in the church of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki.[19] However, the seventh-century mosaics, in which the figures are in hieratic frontal pose, cannot be correlated with the mosaic in the Latomou monastery, in which the survival of the Hellenistic tradition in the rendering of the landscape and the figures is obvious. The soft painterly modelling of the faces and the big eyes with meditative gaze are reminiscent of countenances in the Rotunda and of the pre-seventh-century mosaics in St Demetrios, with a different expression of spirituality, which may be due, however, to the content of the subject. As so few works from the fifth and sixth centuries survive, any stylistic comparisons that can be made offer no secure basis for dating. Nonetheless, what is certain is that the mosaic moves within the artistic tradition of Thessaloniki in the fifth and sixth centuries and not of the West, despite the fact that in this period the city belonged ecclesiastically to Rome and administratively to Constantinople.

The name and the provenance of the mosaicist who made this imposing masterpiece elude us. However, given Thessaloniki's rich tradition in making mosaics, attested by the abundance of mosaic pavements brought to light in the city[20] and by the mural mosaics that have survived, it is assumed that the artist was a Thessalonikan. This would explain, moreover, the maturity evident in the composition, the sensitive handling of colour and the rendering of the spiritual atmosphere, which is the principal distinctive trait of this work.

CH. M.-TS.

9



NOTES

7 For this subject see Xyngopoulos 1929a, 142-180, Grumel 1930, 157-175, Weigand 1931, 194-195 and 1933, 211-215, Diehl 1932, 333-338, Morey 1932, 339-346, Grabar 1946, I, 164 and II, 198-202, Pelekanidis 1949, 45-68, Ihm 1960, 45-51 and 182-184, Hoddinott 1963, 68-69 and 173-179, Pelekanidis 1963, 47-53, Gerke 1964, 179-199, Snyder 1967, 143-152, Lazarev 1967, 47 and 61, Feissel 1983, 97-99, Spieser 1984, 157-164, Ghioles 1984, 83-94, Tsigaridas 1987, 39-54, Spieser 1995, 295-306, and Spieser 1998, 63-73.

8 The text of the codex is taken –not verbatim– from the book of the Prophet Isaiah (25:9-11).

9 Revelation 4, 6-9.

10 Spieser 1998, 63-73, with relevant bibliography.

11 Spieser 1995, 299-302, with relevant references.

12 Bakirtzis 1998, pl. 23.

13 There is an analogous motif also in the Rotunda mosaics, in the depictions of Onesiphoros and Porphyrios, see Volbach – Hirmer 1958, figs 124, 126 and 127, as well as in San Vitale in Ravenna (525-547), Volbach – Hirmer 1958, figs 161, 164 and 175 and Deichmann 1958, figs 311, 316 and 317.

14 Tsigaridas 1987, 46.

15 Xyngopoulos 1929a, 142-180.

16 Xyngopoulos 1962, 341-350.

17 Spieser 1995, 304, for the subject see also the bibliography in note 7.

18 Tsigaridas 1987, 54.

19 Morey 1932, 342-346.

20 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1998. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 2007, 305-351.



ACHEIROPOIETOS

EFTYCHIA KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU

ACHEIROPOIETOS

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

On the feast day of the patron saint of Thessaloniki, St Demetrios, the litany procession advanced along the most important thoroughfare of the ancient city, the *Leophoros* of Byzantine times, made its way east of the ancient agora, the Byzantine *megalophoros*, and then passed through a monumental gateway to enter the Early Christian church of the Acheiropoietos, in which there was apparently a joint cult of the saint and the Mother of God.[1]

Until the fourteenth century, this church is referred to in the texts as 'the church of the Theotokos' or as 'the church of the eternal Virgin, all pure and Mother of God' or as 'the great church of the Theotokos'.[2] This name seems to have been kept until the years just before the city's conquest by the Ottomans, in 1430, as it is mentioned by Archbishop Symeon of Thessaloniki around 1421-1423.[3] Concur-

1. Vine branches unfolding out of large vases and birds pecking grapes create a paradisial atmosphere on the south arch of the tribelon.

2. Dromical colonnades, north and south, emphasize the rhythmical symmetry of the basilica's interior.

3. An apsidal *parekklesion* that was attached to the south side of the church is interpreted as a baptistery or the original diakonikon.



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rently, however, from as early as 1320, the prosonym 'Acheiropoietos' (not made by human hand) was given to the church and the surrounding 'neighbourhood'. This was due to a cult icon of the Virgin Orans, given the same appellation because it was believed to have been painted in a miraculous manner.[4]

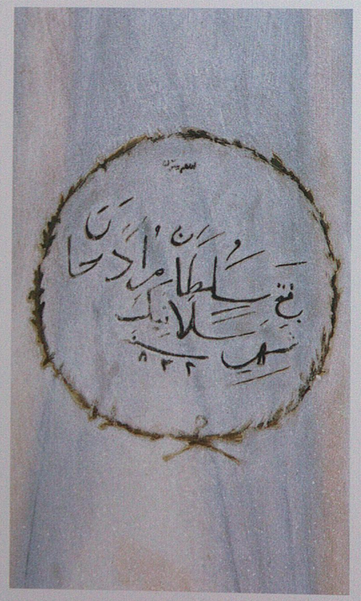
This Early Christian church was linked closely with the history of Thessaloniki, since it was the main venue for many important events.

The sack of the city by the Saracens when it fell to Leo Tripolites in 904,[5] the use of the church as a courthouse by the Duke of Thessaloniki, Georgios Frangopoulos, during the period of Frankish rule,[6] the massacre of the Zealots inside the church in 1345;[7] all bear witness to the continuous presence of the Acheiropoietos at the epicentre of major historic episodes in the city. So, it is not fortuitous that this revered and ancient church was the first to be converted into a Muslim place of worship by Sultan Murad II, when Thessaloniki was captured by the Ottomans in 1430.[8] Permanent reminder of the conquest is the indelible inscription upon the eighth column from the east in the north colonnade, opposite the central south entrance, which reads: 'The Sultan Murad Khan conquered the city of Thessaloniki in 832-833 (anno Hegirae)'[9] (fig. 4). Throughout the Ottoman period, the Acheiropoietos was the official mosque of the Muslim religion, known as the Eski cami or Eski juma cami, that is, the mosque of the old assembly or of Friday prayer.[10] Thus, when Sultan Mehmed IV visited Thessaloniki in 1673, he went to pray in this mosque, the oldest in the city.[11] During the nineteenth century, in writings by foreign travellers and Greek men of letters, the name St Paraskevi appears, which is probably due to a misinterpretation of the Turkish name of the mosque, since Paraskevi is Greek for Friday.

After the liberation of Thessaloniki, in 1912, the Early Christian basilica was deemed suitable for housing the first Byzantine Museum in Greece. After the Greek catastrophe in Asia Minor, in 1922, it was used as lodgings for refugee families. Finally, after extensive repairs, it was restored to its function as a Christian church, in 1930 (figs 5- 6).

The severe earthquakes that have struck Thessaloniki and its monuments from time to time have left their scars on the large Early Christian church. Nevertheless, in spite of drastic repairs, it has managed to preserve to this day the greater part of its original form. After the most recent major earthquakes, in 1978, extensive research was carried out on the monument. Excavations were conducted in soundings inside and outside it, which clarified many problems regarding phases and repairs.[12] Three significant phases of repairs to the Early

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4. Inscription on a column in the basilica, referring to the city's conquest by Sultan Murad Khan: 'The Sultan Murad Khan conquered the city of Thessaloniki in 832-833 (A.H.)' (=1430).

5-6. After the monument had been used to house refugees from Asia Minor, after the Greek catastrophe in 1922, restoration works began so that it could function once again as a church for Christian worship.

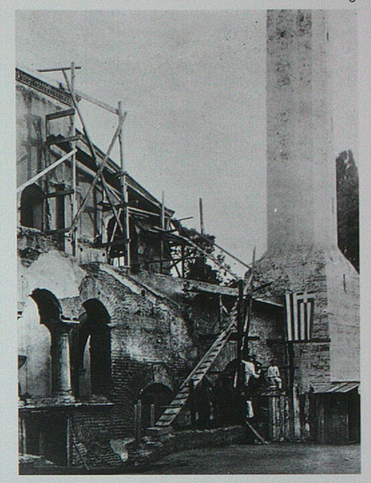
Christian basilica of the fifth century have been detected: one in the early seventh century, a second in the Middle Byzantine period, and a third in late Byzantine times (14th-15th century).

ARCHITECTURE

The Early Christian basilica was built upon the ruins of an earlier building complex, which occupied a larger area. Excavations have shown that part of the complex, in the northeast corner of the precinct, was a public bathhouse, which remained in use well into Early Christian times.[13] Three earlier successive pavements, with mosaics and marble flags, under the north aisle of the basilica, and walls in the south and the east part of the precinct belong to this Roman building.

The Early Christian church represents the classical type of the Hellenistic timber-roofed dromical basilica, with three aisles and

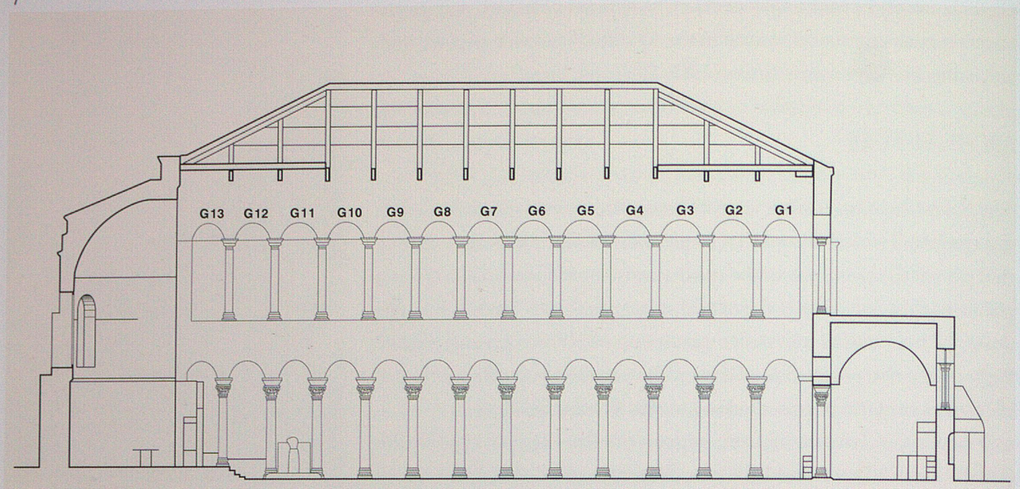
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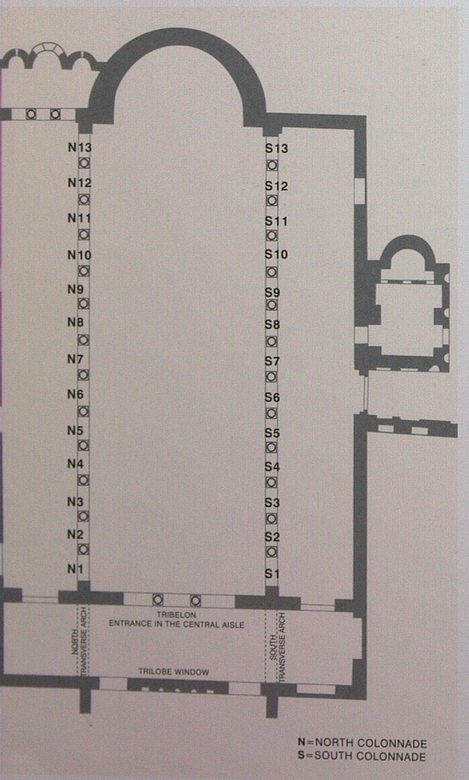
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galleries, as was usual in basilicas in the East.[14] The spare, austere form of the exterior is in marked contrast to the interior, flooded with natural light, with the harmonious articulation of spaces, the rhythmical symmetry of the long colonnades that direct the believer towards the east end of the church, to the holy bema or sanctuary, the principal space of worship.

The basilica's proportions enhance the spacious central aisle as the main liturgical space, which is surrounded by the long and narrow lateral aisles and the narthex, as if by a shell (dimensions 51.90×30.80 m., ratio of central aisle to side aisles 1:2.3) (fig. 8). Much of the original height survives, which is rare for an Early Christian basilica. However, now missing are the clerestory, that is the elevated part of the central aisle, with rows of windows, and the original roof –the present roof is the result of repairs made after 1908 (fig. 7). Missing too are the west gallery above the narthex, the exonarthex on the west front of the church, which probably constituted the east portico of the atrium, also lost, and the staircase up to the galleries, remnants of which survive outside the northwest corner of the church.[15] This staircase was entered from the west doorway in the north wall, which is now blocked. The surviving ruins of the staircase date to the seventh-century phase and consist of a built core, around which spiralled an upward-sloping ramp. The semicircular conch of the holy bema, inscribed in which is the *synthronon* or *sedile* with the episcopal throne, has a stepped formation on its exterior. Projecting marble consoles once supported colonnettes

9



under the original five-lobed window, which has not survived. The three arched windows seen today date from a later phase of the conch, of the seventh century (fig. 3).[16] In the Middle Byzantine period, a side-chapel or parekklesion was formed at the east end of the north aisle, which is today dedicated to St Irene. The monumental vaulted-roofed propylon, in front of the central south entrance to the church, indicates that this was the main entrance from the side of the *Leophoros*. On the west wall of the vaulted-roofed portico, in front of the south doorway, P. Vocotopoulos has discerned a phase from the Middle Byzantine period, in which the technique of concealed brickwork was applied, dated in the eleventh century.[17] East of the propylon of the south entrance, A. Xyngopoulos excavated an apsidal outbuilding, which was restored by A. Zachos in the repairs made in 1926-1928. A. Xyngopoulos interpreted the annexe as a baptistery, whereas D. Pallas considered that it was the original diakonikon of the church (fig. 3).[18]

The abundant natural light plays a particularly important role in the aesthetics of the space, functioning both as direct illumination from the large windows of the sanctuary and the small windows high up, of the now-lost clerestory of the central aisle, and as indirect illumination from the rows of multi-lobed arched windows in the outside walls of the church. The aesthetic values dominating the architectural organization of space in the Acheiropoietos are also characteristic of the architectural sculptures of the church. The rhythmical symmetry of the dromical colonnades and the strict chromatic har-

7. Longitudinal section of the monument. Marked on the drawing is the numbering of the arches of the south gallery.

8. Ground plan of the monument. Marked is the numbering of the arches of the north and south colonnades of the central aisle.

9. The significance of the tribelon as main entrance from the narthex to the naos is emphasized by green marble columns and the splendid mosaics on the intrados of the arches.

mony of the greyish white marble from Prokonnesos, principal material used for the architectural sculptures, as well as in the floors of the church, are enlivened by the subtle alternation of volumes and planes (figs 2, 11). The lavish cymatia on the Attic bases of the columns alternate with the smooth surfaces of the slender shafts. The lacey volume of the Theodosian column capital, with the elegant serrated acanthus and the smooth plain abacus, is crowned by the dosseret, on which fleshy leaves of a soft acanthus form an aureole around the symbol of the Christian faith, the cross or the Chi-Rho monogram (fig. 10). The less elaborate sculptural composition of the colonnades of the galleries, as these have emerged after restoration works in the early twentieth century, emphasizes the principal role of the central aisle in the organization and function of the Early Christian basilica. Particularly pronounced is the colonnade of the tribelon, the entrance into the naos, which is differentiated by the variations of the Theodosian column capitals, as well as by the colour contrast of its two columns of green Thessalian marble, known as *atrakios lithos*.

Enhanced within the harmonious frame formed by the architectural sculptures, the marble dadoes and the marble floors in Early Christian basilicas were the mural mosaics with their variety of colours and their gold and silver tesserae, primarily in the conch of the holy bema, where there was usually a representation of Theophany, but also on other surfaces of the building. No pictorial representation in the conch of the bema has survived in the Acheiropoietos. The cross revealed there during recent consolidation works in the church dates from the period of the monument's return to Christian worship, in the late 1920s. Today, mural mosaics are preserved on the intrados of the arches of the colonnades of the ground floor and the south gallery, on the two transverse arches that divide the ceiling of the narthex into three parts, on the trilobe arched window in the west wall of the narthex and on the arches of the tribelon. Remnants of a mural mosaic can be seen on the west wall of the south outbuilding. One more mosaic, which was uncovered in the recent consolidation works, underneath later masonry, on the north face of the west pier of the south gallery, also belongs to the ensemble of extant mural mosaics of the Acheiropoietos. This mosaic, which was detached from the wall and is exhibited in the Museum of Byzantine Culture, Thessaloniki, is evidence that mural mosaics originally existed also on other surfaces of the monument.

From the Early Christian painting in the Acheiropoietos basilica, a small bust of a figure has survived on the archivolt of the seventh arch from the west in the south gallery.[19] The summary drawing of the face,

10. The Theodosian column capital of greyish white marble from Prokonnesos, with serrated acanthus leaves, supports a dosseret with fleshy soft acanthus leaves surrounding the symbol of the cross or the Chi-Rho monogram inside an aureole.

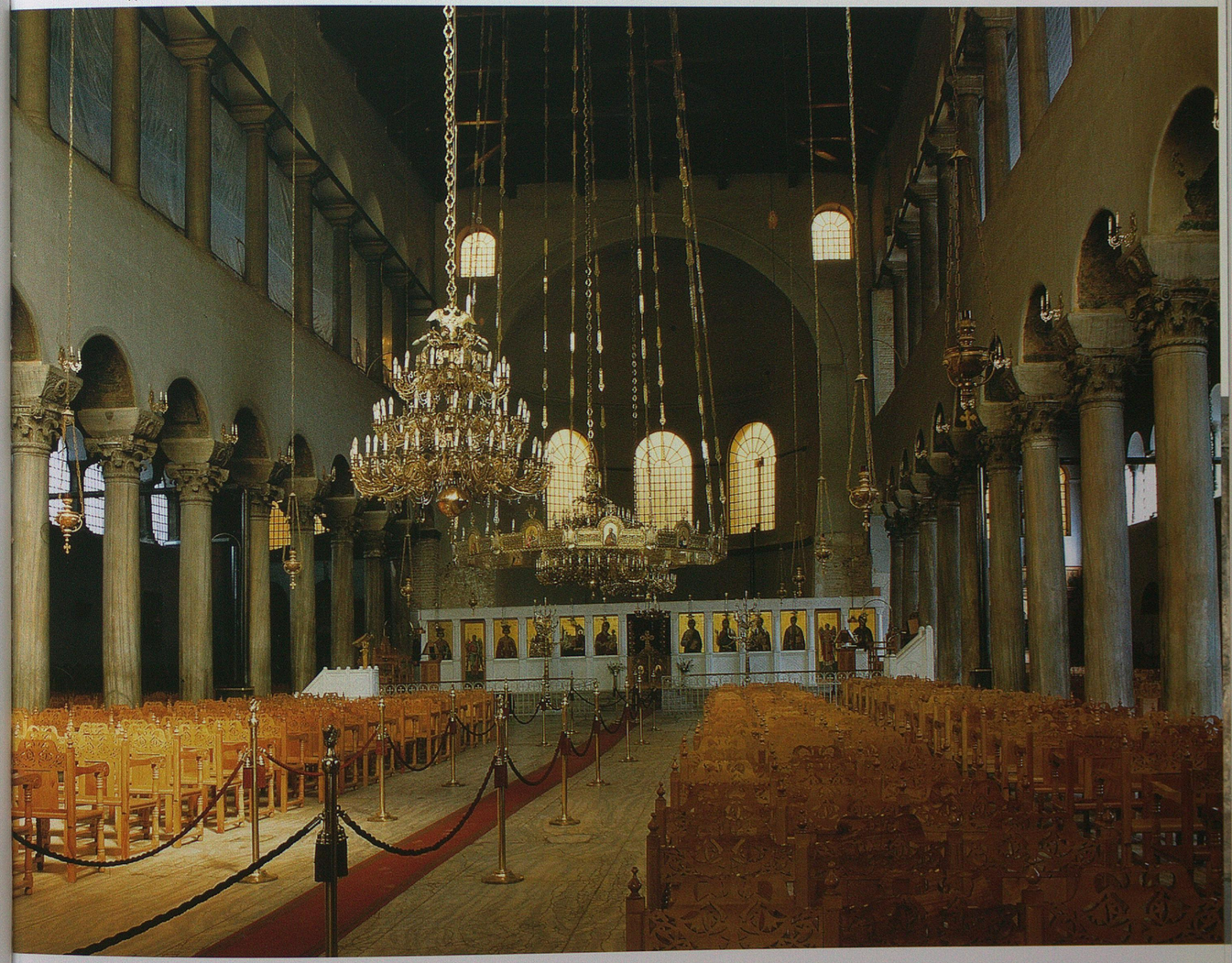
11. The rhythmical symmetry of the dromical colonnades emphasizes the movement towards the east, where the locus sanctus of worship is located.

10



on the same plaster as the mosaics were executed, suggests that this is a work of the mosaicists employed in the church. The wall-paintings preserved over a large area of the south aisle, on the wall above the south colonnade, belong to a later phase of the monument and are dated to the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Depicted in alignment, alternately in full body and in bust, are eighteen of the Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia, who were put to death in the reign of Emperor Licinius.[20] Traces of wall-painting are visible also in the north parekklesion.

11



THE MOSAICS: THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMME

Principal feature of the iconographic programme of the mosaics in the Acheiropoietos is that, although each arch constitutes an independent mosaic composition, the ensemble as a whole conforms to a strictly defined thematic organization serving a specific aim, namely to promote their religious symbolism. The thematic organization makes provision for strict symmetry in the correspondence of subjects between the arches of the north and the south colonnade of the central aisle, in the division of the entire colonnade into smaller thematic units –every three arches–, and in the emphasis of the seventh central arch of the colonnades with the dominating symbol of the cross. However, in parallel with the symmetrical arrangement, an intentional differentiation is observed on the corresponding arches, either in the colours or in minor variations of the basic subject, so that in the end each arch constitutes a discreet composition with its own style, a unique piece in the precious picture gallery of the Acheiropoietos mosaics.

On most of the intrados the mosaics have survived in quite good condition. There is notable damage on the arches of the south colonnade, of the central aisle, where the lacunae were filled in with colour in conservation works before 1976.

12. The south transverse arch of the narthex.

12

THE MOSAICS IN THE NARTHEX

As the worshipper enters the narthex, he concentrates his gaze on the two large transverse arches of the ceiling, where, in a paradisial space, spiralling stems with fruits and flowers, symbols of paradisial joy and heavenly luxury, unfurl from inside big ribbed vases, forming 'crowns' (wreaths) of Christ's triumph and glory (I Peter, 5:4) (figs 12-16, 18).

The wreaths encircle partridges and doves, heralds of Christian peace to the human soul, basins of fish, symbol of Christ in eucharistic symbolism, and fruit-stands overflowing with grapes, fruits of the blessed vine. From the wreaths hang red fruits, apples or pomegranates, while little birds peck the stems.

At the centre of the north arch, executed in gold tesserae, is the Chi-Rho monogram within the light blue celestial disc (figs 16, 18). Correspondingly on the south arch, the Chi-Rho monogram is flanked by four birds and sacred books in the adjacent wreaths, symbols of the Holy Gospels of the Four Evangelists (fig. 12).

The same subject is repeated in minor tones, with less overtly expressive means, in the mosaics of the trilobe window in the west wall of the narthex (fig. 17). From large vases at the ends of the intrados



13-15. Wreaths of fruits and flowers enclose doves and partridges, fruit-stands full of fruits and basins full of fish, symbols of paradisial joy. Details from the south transverse arch of the narthex.

13



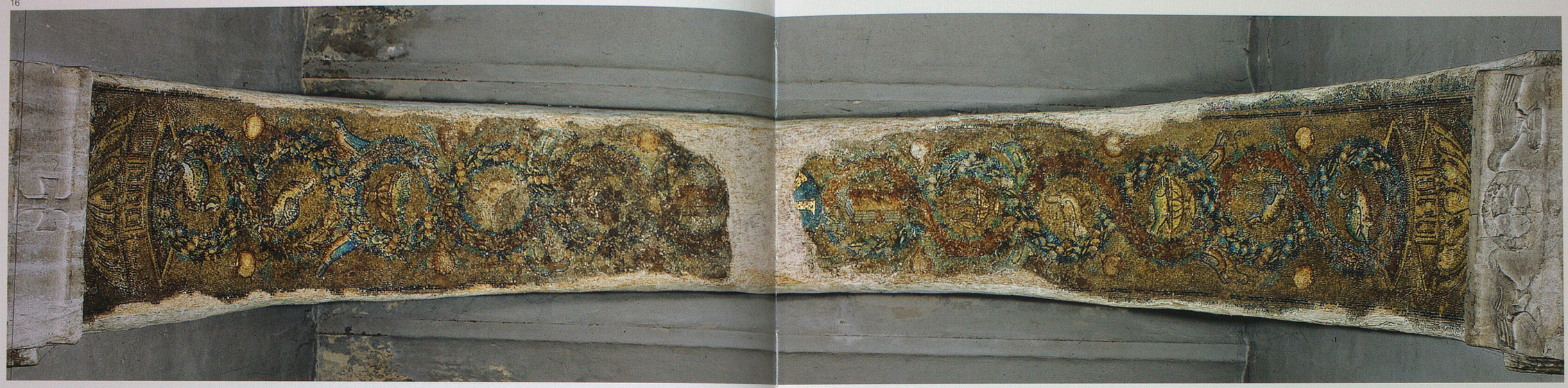
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16



sprout intertwined stems and vine tendrils forming circular frames around juicy bunches of grapes. At the centre of the north and the south arch is a Christogram in gold tesserae, within two concentric circles, one light blue and one dark blue, symbolizing the heavenly sphere. Correspondingly on the middle arch, the gold cross is projected against the light-blue heavenly sphere.

17



18



16. On the ceiling of the narthex, on the north transverse arch, birds and flowers, symbols of paradisial delight, frame the Chi-Rho monogram within the blue disc of the heavenly sphere.

17. The symbolism of the coiling tendrils and the juicy grapes is repeated in the mosaics of the trilobe window of the narthex.

18. Detail from the north transverse arch of the narthex.

THE MOSAICS ON THE TRIBELON

As clergy and congregants passed into the main aisle of the church, through the imposing tribelon, they beheld on high, on its three arches, mosaics that repeat the paradisial ambience of the mosaics in the narthex, creating a sense of euphoria and spiritual exaltation. The subject on the transverse arches of the narthex, which are the culmination of the thematic unit, returns synoptically but intensely in the mosaics of the tribelon, which are the introduction to the church proper (figs 9, 19-22). The two outer arches are similar. From large vases flanked by birds unfurl spiralling vine branches hanging with bunches of grapes, at which little birds peck (figs 20, 22, 24). At the centre of the intrados, within a deep-blue heavenly sphere, is a cross with 'drops' on its arms and pale-blue rays. Around the cross fly four white doves. Correspondingly, on the middle arch are large basins flanked by birds, from which sprout stems with ears of wheat, leaves and flowers, at which little birds peck (fig. 21). Dominating the centre of the intrados is the symbol of the cross, projected against a deep-blue heavenly sphere (fig. 19). Sheaves of light emanate from the centre of the cross, which is framed by four white doves. Preserved on the lower part of the intrados of the central and the south arch are two donor inscriptions. There was most probably a third inscription on the now-destroyed lower part of the north arch. The two inscriptions are written with silver tesserae on a red ground, inside the frame of a *tabula ansata*. The beginning and the end of the inscription is marked respectively by a cross and an ivy leaf. The inscription on the south arch is anonymous, characteristic of the humility of the first centuries of Christianity:

Ὑπὲρ ε[ὐχῆς οὗ οἶδε ὁ θεὸς τὸ ὄνομα

[For the prayer of him whom God knows]

The inscription on the middle arch of the tribelon mentions the name of the donor, Andreas. His identification is important for dating the mosaics in the church:

Ὑπὲρ ε[ὐχῆς] / [Ἀ]νδρέου ταπινο[ῦ]

[For the prayer of humble Andreas]

19. Detail of the middle arch of the tribelon with the symbol of the cross within the heavenly sphere.

20, 22. Rich vine branches with juicy bunches of grapes pecked by birds frame the disc-symbol of the heavenly sphere with the symbol of the cross, on the south and the north arch of the tribelon.

21. Four white doves, symbols of the Four Evangelists, frame the heavenly sphere with the cross in the middle arch of the tribelon, with the large basins from which sprout ears of wheat, leaves and flowers that little birds peck.

23-24. Details from the ends of the intrados of the middle and the north arch of the tribelon.

19



20



21



22



23



24



25-28. In the first two west arches of the north (N1-N2) and the south colonnade (S1-S2) broad soft acanthus leaves form volutes.

29-31. In the same thematic unit as the first two west arches, the third ones in line (N3 and S3 respectively) are differentiated, stressing at the centre of the intrados the symbol of the cross upon the gold disc.

32-33. An open-ended pattern of imbrications covers arches N4 of the north and S4 of the south colonnade.

25



THE MOSAICS ON THE COLONNADES OF THE CENTRAL AISLE

The mosaics on the colonnades of the church proper or naos, which because of their dromical arrangement direct the gaze towards the holy bema, although featuring floral and geometric motifs similar to those in the narthex, do not reproduce the paradisial atmosphere of the latter. With the strict symmetry between the north and the south arcade, they draw the eye to the east. Their symbolism is emphasized by the symbol of the cross and alternatively by cruciform floral ornaments.

The first three arches from the west in the north and the south colonnade (N1, N2, N3 and S1, S2, S3) carry vegetal decoration in symmetrical arrangement. From the ends of the intrados sprout successive bunches of soft, broad acanthus leaves, forming scrolls as they curve (figs 25-28).

On arches N3 and S3, bunches of soft, broad acanthus leaves at the ends of the intrados are the base for four successive fan-shaped motifs forming a kind of vegetal lamp-stand. At the centre of the intrados, a cross with pearls is projected against a gold disc (figs 29-31).

The next unit of arches, N4-S4, N5-S5 and N6-S6 presents a different decorative concept, with open-ended patterns developed on the surface of the intrados, like a mesh.

On arches N4-S4, imbrications enlivened by florets cover the intrados, starting in the opposite direction from its two ends, so as to meet addorsed at the apex of the arch, forming two quadrilateral panels with incurved sides (figs 32-33). Thus, a counter-movement is created, emphasizing the centre of the intrados, which is occupied by a blue quatrefoil floral motif. The intrados on arches N5 and S5 is covered completely by a mesh of stems intertwining with flowers, large green conical flowers and smaller pinkish florets. At the centre of the intrados of the north arch (N5) is a cruciform floral ornament, while on the corresponding south arch (S5) is a multi-petal flower resembling a daisy (figs 34-36).

On arches N6 and S6, ears of wheat, leaves and flowers spread on the surface of the intrados, scattered on the north arch and gathered in a sheaf on the south. At the centre of the intrados of both arches is a cruciform floral ornament, from which radiate leaves in alternating colours (figs 37-39).

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34-36. A decorative mesh of stems and flowers covers arches N5 of the north and S5 of the south colonnade. At the centre of arch S5 is a multi-petalled flower.

36



37



38



39



37-39. A decorative mesh of ears of wheat, leaves and flowers covers the intrados of arches N6 of the north and S6 of the south colonnade, while at the centre of the arch is a cruciform vegetal ornament.

On the seventh arch N7 and the corresponding S7, which constitute the centre of both colonnades of the naos and lie on the axis of the south main entrance to the church, the principal subject of the mosaics is narrower than on the other arches and is surrounded by a wide deep-blue frame and a rope-like guilloche, for extra emphasis. At the centre of the intrados a gold cross is projected against three concentric circles in graduated shades of blue, in the 'rainbow technique', which symbolize the celestial sphere (figs 40-41).

At the ends of the intrados of arch N7, two-handled conical vases serve as a base for two broad fin-shaped branches terminating in rinceaux. Correspondingly on the south arch, resting on the conical vases are two cornucopias, from which protrude golden-green acanthus leaves terminating in stems with leaves and fruits. This pagan

41



40



40-41. The seventh arch (N7) of the north colonnade and the corresponding one (S7) of the south, which are in the middle of the colonnades and on the axis of the south main entrance to the naos, are stressed particularly by a strong deep blue border. At the centre of the arch, framed by large fin-shaped branches and cornucopias, a gold cross is projected upon the heavenly sphere.

symbol of the abundance and wealth brought by Peace, symbolizes here the Christian *Pax* of which Christ preaches, and the heavenly luxury of Paradise.

The next thematic unit includes arches N8, N9 and N10 in the north colonnade, and correspondingly S8, S9 and S10 on the south.

On arches N8 and S8, there are big phiales full of water, from which sprout leafy branches with fruits and flowers, which intertwine to form three wreaths. The outer wreaths enclose white doves. The middle wreath encircles a cruciform floral ornament (figs 42-44).

42-44. On arches N8 of the north colonnade and correspondingly S8 of the south, branches with leaves, fruits and flowers forming wreaths with white doves, unfold from water-filled phialai. The middle wreath encloses a cruciform floral ornament.

45. Detail from the arch N9 with imbricated mesh.

42



43



The intrados on each of the middle arches of this thematic unit, N9 and S9, is filled with a mesh of imbrications which meet addorsed at its centre, forming two quadrilateral panels with curved sides (figs 45-46, 49). The subject on these arches is a variation of the mosaics on arches N4 and S4.

Depicted respectively on the intrados of arches N10 and S10 are conical two-handled vases full of water and flanked by birds. Vine branches with juicy bunches of grapes and large leaves cover the gold ground (figs 47-48).

44



45



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47



48



49



46-47. The mosaic in arches N9 and S9 forms an imbricated mesh.

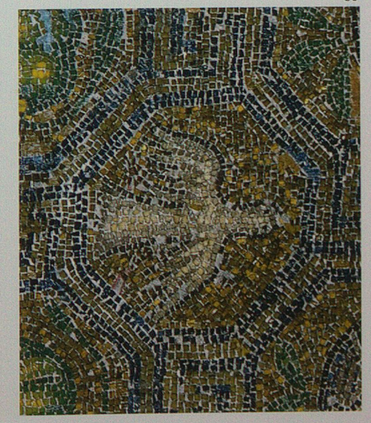
48-49. Vine branches with vine leaves and bunches of grapes unfold against the gold ground of the mosaic on arch N10.

50. An interesting variation on arch S13 is the representation of a flying eagle with outspread wings.

The next thematic unit is encountered on the easternmost arches of the colonnades of the nave, N11-S11, N12-S12 and N13-S13. Their basic subject is a combination of geometric motifs with fruits and birds (figs 50-53).

On the two end arches of the thematic unit, N11-S11 and N13-S13, the intrados is covered with a mesh of meander or Greek-key motifs forming octahedrons, lozenges and swastikas. The octahedrons and lozenges enclose, in alternation, birds, leaves, flowers and fruits. An interesting variation on arch S13 is the representation of a flying eagle with outspread wings (fig. 50). Although birds in mosaics are usually depicted immobile and in profile, representations with open wings are not uncommon, as in the basilica of Dometios at Nikopolis and in the basilica at Herakleia Lynkestis, in the church

50



51-54. Within a mesh of meander pattern, lozenges and swastikas, on arches N11-S11, N13-S13 or rinceaux and rotae sericae on arches N12-S12, birds alternate with flowers and fruits.

of deacon Thomas in Jordan or in Santa Maria Capua Vetere in southern Italy, in the basilica of St Stephen Kephalos on the island of Kos, or in the mosaic in the central aisle of the church of San Severo in Classe, Ravenna.[21]

On the middle arches in the unit, that is N12 and S12, the surface of the intrados is covered by coiling and intertwining bands forming rotae sericae, between which are birds, fruits and rosettes (figs 52-53).

51



52



53



54



55



55-58. On arches G2 and G3 branches with fruits and flowers unfold out of large vases or baskets. At the centre of the arch is an eight-rayed star or a gold cross.

THE MOSAICS IN THE SOUTH GALLERY

In the galleries of the basilica only the mosaics on the arcade of the south gallery survive. These mosaics are in counterpoint to the seventh central arch of the colonnades of the central aisle, which they resemble in the organization of the subject. The principal subject is narrower and surrounded by one wide deep-blue band and one 'gem-studded' band with alternating geometric motifs, to give it greater emphasis. Dominating the centre of the intrados is the symbol of the cross. Thus, the believer, on raising his gaze heavenwards, beholds everywhere the paramount symbol of Christianity.

Starting from the west, no mosaic is preserved on the first arch. On arch G2, depicted at either end of the intrados is a woven basket bedecked with ribbons and filled with luxuriant leafy branches with pomegranates. At the centre of the arch, a gold eight-rayed star is projected against a deep-blue disc (figs 55-56). On arch G3, depicted at either end of the intrados are two large ribbed vases decorated with ribbons and holding branches laden with leaves and flowers. At the centre of the arch, a gold Greek cross is projected against the heavenly sphere (figs 57-58). On the next arch, G4, successive sheaves of soft acanthus leaves form a kind of vegetal lamp-stand. At the centre of the arch, a gold Greek cross is projected against the heavenly sphere (fig. 59). On arch G5, depicted at either end of the intrados is a large ribbed vase from which sprout shoots intertwined with knots and forming three wreaths (fig. 60). The middle wreath encircles a gold cross projected against the disc of

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57



58



the celestial sphere, while the two outer wreaths enclose bunches of grapes and vine leaves. Depicted at the ends of the intrados of arch G6 are leaf-shaped bases from which sprout sheaves of blossoming branches. At the centre of the arch, projected upon a wide band is the deep-blue disc of the heavenly sphere with the gold cross (fig. 61). On arch G7 there are two large ribbed vases with leaf-shaped base, from which sprout branches laden with red fruits. At the centre of the arch, the cross of gold tesserae is projected against the deep-blue disc of the heavenly sphere, outlined in silver (fig. 62).

On the intrados of arch G8, successive sheaves of big flexible leaves, in the shape of a lamp-stand, flank the central subject of the gold cross projected against the celestial sphere. At each end of the intrados on arch G9 there are two large baskets from which issue leafy guilloches laden with fruits. At the centre of the intrados is a wide red circular band with zigzag pattern of silver tesserae, framed by a concentric silver band and the deep-blue disc of the heavenly sphere with the gold cross (fig. 63). Correspondingly, at the centre of arch G10 the deep-blue disc with the gold cross is encircled by concentric bands, one of silver tesserae and one red, crenellated on the outside. At the ends of the intrados are large vases supporting successive sheaves of supple leaves in the shape of a lamp-stand (figs 64, 66). Depicted on arch G11 are large baskets adorned with blue bands in crossed arrangement. From the baskets unfurl rich leafy branches with flowers. At the centre of the arch is a silver frame surrounding the deep-blue disc of the celestial sphere, projected against which is a gold Latin cross with rays issuing from its centre (figs 65, 67). On arch G12, leafy branches with fruit unfurl from two

59. On arch G4 the gold cross at the centre of the mosaic is framed by stems of soft acanthus leaves.

60. On arch G5 the stems form wreaths full of grapes which frame a gold cross at the centre of the intrados.

61. Sheaves of blossoming branches frame the disc of the heavenly sphere with the gold cross on arch G6.

62. Branches laden with red fruits, symbols of paradisial feasting, frame the gold cross on arch G7.

63. From the large baskets at the edges of the intrados on arch G9, abundant stems with fruits unfold.

big two-handled vases at the ends of the intrados. Prominent at the centre of the arch is the gold cross inside the deep-blue disc of the heavenly sphere.

On completing the review of the iconographic programme of the mosaics in the Acheiropoietos, the impression is that the imposing entrance and the triumphal character of the mosaics in the narthex, with their paradisial ambience and vibrant colours, is followed by a minor development of the symbolisms on the long colonnades, which directs the worshipper's gaze to the principal representation in the conch, possibly a representation of Theophany. Only after the central arch is the paradisial atmosphere recalled on arches N8 and S8. However, as we raise our gaze heavenwards, towards the

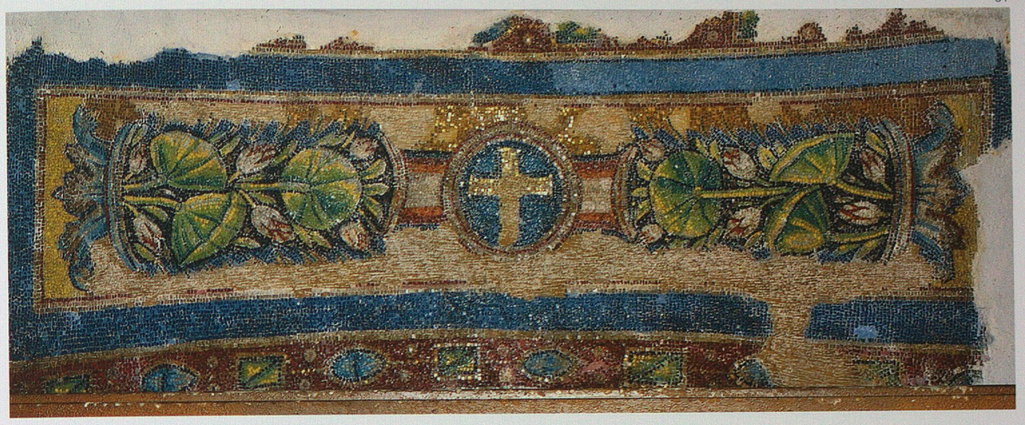
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60



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62



63



galleries, the triumphal character is enhanced once again with the symbolic paradisial subjects.

As the visitor proceeds through the monument, from the narthex to the sanctuary, he is conscious of a musical theme unfolding during this rhythmical course. The small thematic units with their variations are developed like musical parts of a melody. The basic theme returns through the continuous variations that stress it, despite the differentiations, and reaches an intensive climax in the mosaics of the south gallery, where uniformity in the composition is observed, with many baskets and fruit-laden guilloches or bunches of leaves.

64



65



ICONOGRAPHIC AND STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION

The roots of Early Christian painting of the fourth and fifth centuries can be traced in the art of Late Antiquity, which was enriched semeiologically with the eschatological semantics of Christian funerary painting. In the catacombs of Rome, in the mural-painted tombs of the Christian cemeteries of Thessaloniki, as well as in the early basilicas in the Eastern Mediterranean, Hellenistic subjects acquired a religious symbolism that endows Early Christian painting with its particular character.[22]

The floral motifs and abundant foliage, the baskets overflowing with fruits and the cornucopia, which allude to a fertile and felicitous world, recall in Christian painting paradisial joy and peace[23] in a blissful space, Paradise as *domus aeterna*, space of the soul's salvation. It is distinctive of the symbolism that paradisial compositions took on in Christian art that vases, vine branches and birds were particularly common in the space of the holy bema and the baptistery, on the mosaic pavements of Early Christian basilicas.[24] The transition from the blissful space of the Elysian Fields to Christian Paradise differentiates the semeiology of Christian iconography, preserving the morphological elements of Antiquity, and forms a new dynamic that combines symbolism with realism. The paradisial landscapes with doves and partridges, fish and basins of blessed water,[25] wreaths of leaves and fruits,[26] baskets of fruits,[27] are accompanied by representations of more overt and pronounced Christian character, such as the Gospels and the Four Evangelists, in the form of doves flanking the holy books. Dominant among the symbolic representations are the supreme symbols of Christianity, the Chi-Rho monogram and the cross, as triumphal symbol of victory over death. The cross in its various forms, even as a cruciform ornament, is the central axis of every paradisial composition and is a symbolic rendering of Theophany.

The individual subjects of the mural mosaics in the Acheiropoietos appear in mosaic pavements of the fourth and fifth centuries in basilicas in Greece, East Illyricum and the Eastern Mediterranean.[28] In Thessaloniki, akin subjects are encountered on the floors of the so-called Nymphaeum (baptistery) to the south of the church of the Holy Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia), in the basilica in Moreas and Mouson Streets, in the Panorama basilica and in the building in the east cemetery, north of the Evangelistria graveyard.[29]

The peculiarity of the mural mosaics in the Acheiropoietos lies in

64, 66. On arch G10 large vases support successive sheaves of soft leaves.

65, 67. At the edges of arch G11 the baskets supporting the leafy stems are adorned with blue bands.

66



67



68



69



the fact that the individual symbolic subjects of Hellenistic provenance, floral and faunal, combined with geometric motifs, were organized in compositions of specific design and highly symbolic character, aimed at familiarizing Christians with beliefs in the life after death.[30]

In terms of style, what is characteristic of the Acheiropoietos mosaics, in contrast to the mosaic pavements contemporary with them, is that the subject covers the whole of the intrados, avoiding lacunae. The soft fleshy leaves and the stems spread upon the gold ground, forming scrolls that fill the entire surface. The same applies to the geometric motifs, which are combined with plant or animal elements, in an open-ended pattern covering the surface of the intrados. The paradisial compositions are rendered naturalistically, freely drawn with considerable facility. The volumes of the birds' bodies are modelled with plasticity, while the whole ambience is illusionistic.

The colours of the glass-paste tesserae are vivid and vibrant: pinks and blues, reds and greens, white and black, purple and deep blue. The disc of the heavenly sphere, against which is projected the symbol of the cross, is rendered in shades of blue, executed in 'rainbow technique'. In addition to the ground of the compositions, crosses and Christograms are described with gold tesserae. Gold striations are used sporadically at various points, to impart radiance to the compositions. Silver tesserae upon a red ground have also been used, in the gallery (G9) (fig. 67) and in the inscriptions on the tribelon.

In general, the precise planning, which serves the intended symbolism, the careful execution and the wealth of colours create an ensemble of mural mosaics of high artistic quality and great sensitivity.

DATING

The harmonious discourse developed between the building and the architectural sculptures, as well as the harmony of materials and colours between the shiny marble elements and the warm earth tones of the stone and the glass tesserae, confirm a single initial conception of the basilica's design, in all details, as well as in the original execution of the mosaics.

The first piece of evidence for dating the Acheiropoietos is the writing of the indiction on the bricks used to build its nave, which according to M. Vickers, defines as *terminus post quem* for its construction the year 447/8.[31] The dating of the Theodosian column capitals of the basilica falls within this timeframe, which is based on

the close relation and similarity to the sculptures in the Stoudios monastery in Constantinople, which are a fixed reference point for architectural sculptures of the period (453-454). This dating is reinforced by the inscription on the tribelon, which mentions the name of the donor 'Andreas'. In the view of R. Cormack, the Andreas in the inscription is identified as the homonymous Archbishop of Thessaloniki, who was incumbent of the city's episcopal throne between 491 and 497.[32] At variance with this identification is the omission of the bishop's title, which was not usual. On the basis of this fact, Ch. Bakirtzis has identified the Andreas in the donor inscription as the priest Andreas who represented the Archbishop of Thessaloniki at the Council of Chalkedon and signed its Acta on 13 October 451.[33] This dating is consistent too with the internal dating traits in the mural mosaics.

68-69. Copies of mosaic representations (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, pencil and gouache, 1888-1890).

NOTES

1 Xyngopoulos 1950, 1-26. Pelekanidis 1955-1960, 410-415.
2 Papazotos 1982a, 112-132.
3 Foundoulis 1968, 1-6.
4 Xyngopoulos 1950, 1-26. Xyngopoulos 1954, 256-262.
5 Ioannes Kaminiates 12: *Ιωάννου κληρικού και κουβουκλησίου του Καμινιάτου, Εις την άλωσιν της Θεσσαλονίκης*, publ. Gertrud Böhlig [CFHB IV], Berlin – New York 1973.
6 Janin 1973, 376.
7 Ioannes Kantakouzenos, 571.
8 Ioannes Anagnostes, 520: *Ιωάννου Αναγνώστου, Διήγησις περί της τελευταίας αλώσεως της Θεσσαλονίκης* [CSHB], Bonn 1838.
9 Bakalopoulos 1937, 373. Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 1989, fig. 5.
10 Tsaras 1973, 167-184.
11 Texier – Pullan 1864, 145-147. Gougousis 1915, 227.
12 Theocharidou 1982, 31-32. Papazotos 1982b, 87-88. Theocharidou 1986, 61-70. Zombou-Asimi 2002, 209-220.
13 Bakirtzis 1983, 310-329.
14 Tafrali 1913, 151-153. Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 35-38. Pelekanidis 1949, 11-41. Orlandos 1954, I, 153, pl. 118. Hoddinott 1963, 155 ff. Krautheimer 1965, 106-108. Ferrero 1975, 157-169. Kleinbauer 1984, 241-257.
15 Theocharidou 1983, 33-34.
16 Oraiopoulos 1982, 106-107. Oraiopoulos 1992, 11-32.
17 Vocotopoulos 1979, 255, pl. 19.
18 Xyngopoulos 1953b, 479. Pallas 1952, 123.
19 Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou – Tsioumi 1978, 238, pl. 106ε.
20 Xyngopoulos 1957, 6-30. Kissas 1987, 37-49.
21 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 2003, pls 126, 127. *Greek Language* 2001, 37, no. 22. Piccirillo 1997, 185. Farioli Campanati 1982, fig. 135. Bermond Montanari 1968, col. pl.
22 Bisconti 1998, 33-53. Pelekanidis 1969, 225-230. Marki 1990, 169-194. Pelekanidou 2005, 191-205. Pazaras 1981, 373-379. Marki 2005, 85-91.
23 Charalambidis 1980, *passim*.
24 Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 1997, 128-132. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1980b, 217-218. Loverdou-Tsigarida 1994, 155-163, pls 84-87. Cvetković-Tomašević 1978, 11-125.
25 John 3:5: *ἐάν μή τις γεννηθῇ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ Πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ* [Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God]. Isaiah 12:3: *ἀντλήσατε ὕδωρ μετ' εὐφροσύνης ἐκ τῶν πηγῶν τοῦ σωτηρίου* [Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation].
26 James 1:12: *στέφανον Ζωῆς* [the crown of life], I Peter 5:4: *ἀμάραντον τῆς δόξης στέφανον* [the crown of glory that does not fade away], Revelation 2:10: *στέφανον ζωῆς* [crown of life], I Corinthians 9:25: *ἄφθαρτον στέφανον* [imperishable crown].
27 Brenk 1995, pl. 4.
28 Pelekanidis 1977b, 67-74, pls 1-2. Pelekanidis 1977c, 75-94, pls 6, 23, 24, 29. Pelekanidis 1977a, 3-15, pls 1, 5, 6. Pelekanidis 1974, *passim*. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1987, *passim*.
29 Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1997, 68-69, pl. 12. Asimakopoulou-Atzaka 1998, 122, pl. 58, 260, pl. 181, 331, pl. XLIX, 263, pls XLVII, XLVIII.
30 Kourkoutidou-Nikolaidou 2001, 3-4.
31 Vickers 1973, 294.
32 Cormack 1969, 51.
33 Bakirtzis 1978, 37-44.



HAGIA SOPHIA

CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

HAGIA SOPHIA

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

One of the most important Byzantine churches in Thessaloniki, dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God and better known as Hagia Sophia, still stands in the historical centre of the city.[1] The church is imposing by virtue of its size, even though the present picture is not to its advantage, as the level of the ground around it has risen due to the accumulation of deposits over the centuries and to the construction of multi-storey buildings in recent times. Both have altered detrimentally the original scale and impressive aspect of the monument.

The glory of the edifice is apparent from the diversity of names given it in Byzantine texts (Great Church of Thessaloniki, the great

1. Christ ascends to heaven within a mandorla held by two flying angels. Detail of the representation of the Ascension in the dome of the church (see fig. 23).

2. Angel holding the mandorla of Christ in the representation of the Ascension, one of the loveliest figures in Byzantine art.

3. The church of the Holy Wisdom of God (Hagia Sophia), one of the most important churches in Thessaloniki, is the third building erected on the same site and exemplifies the transition from the Early Christian basilica to a cross-plan type (southeast side).



3

2

4



4. Northeast side of the church in an earlier photograph (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

5. Ground plan of the church showing the additions made in the Ottoman period (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

6. Elevation of the north side. Transverse section showing the masonry (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

church of the Wisdom of God, etc.),[2] and from the fact that in Byzantine times a major fair lasting eight days was held on the occasion of the feast of the Holy Wisdom of God. This glory was surely not due only to the church's size but also to its role as a spiritual centre; indeed, its congregants were renowned for their spirituality and called *Agiosophites*. There are indications too that already from the tenth century and primarily from the twelfth, as well as during the period of Latin Rule (1205-1224) and until the fall of Thessaloniki to the Ottomans in 1430, this church was the Greek Orthodox cathedral (metropolis) of the city. The narthex and the south part of the ambulatory were used for the burial of dignitaries from as early as the end of the ninth century.[3]

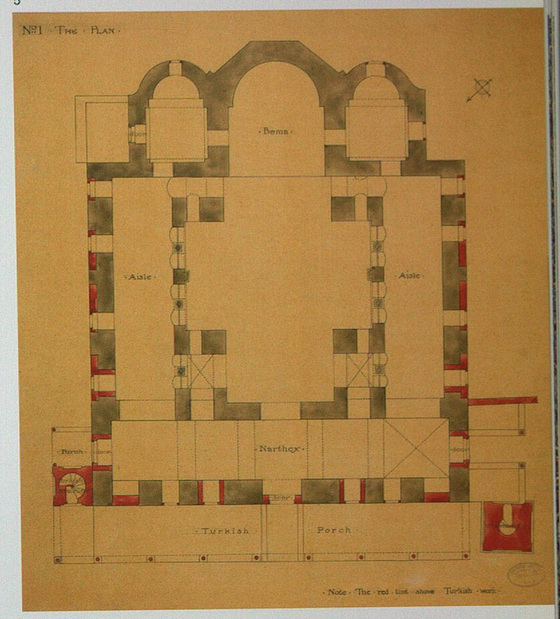
The surviving church is the third building to occupy the same site. Evidence revealed in excavations on the plots of the buildings around it[4] shows that to the south of the church there were originally Roman antiquities (Nymphaeum and baths). In Early Christian times, possibly in the fourth or fifth century, a large five-aisled basilica was erected, which seems to have been destroyed by the earthquakes that struck Thessaloniki around 620. Remnants of the basilica were uncovered in earlier excavations, as well as in more recent investigations made after the earthquakes in 1978. The general

view is that the present church, which is smaller, was constructed after the destruction of the Early Christian building, in the seventh or eighth century.[5]

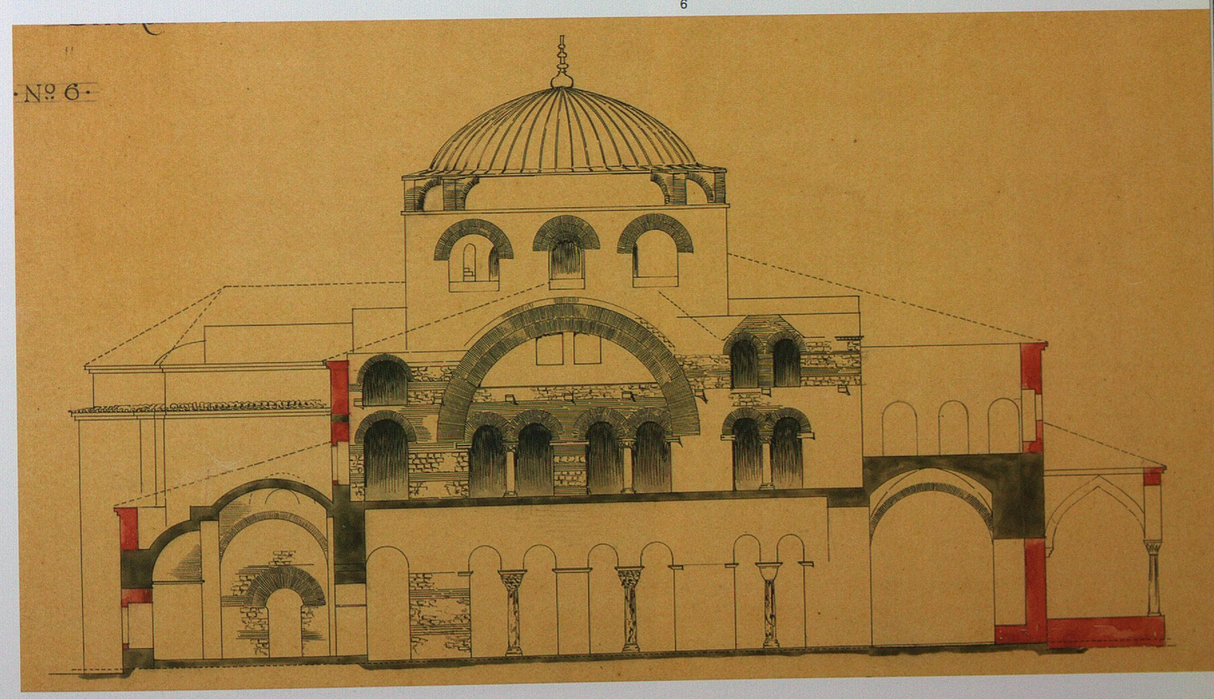
The earliest known written information about the church is given by St Theodore the Studite; in a letter to his uncle Platon, Theodore mentions that he prayed in Hagia Sophia on 25 March 795.[6] Other earlier Byzantine testimonies, existing in the mosaic decoration, will be discussed below.

After the capitulation of Thessaloniki in 1430, the church continued to be used for Christian worship until 1523/4, when it became a mosque for Muslim worship. However, a Serb source (Slavonic *menaion* for October) refers to a total destruction of its library during the capture of the city. In 1890 (22 August) Hagia Sophia suffered serious damage in the fire that raged in Thessaloniki. From the spring of 1908 until 1910, the engineer M. Le Tourneau, in the framework of the collaboration between the French and the Ottoman government, conserved the mosaics and renovated the monument, whilst it was still a mosque.[7] It was returned to Christian worship in 1913.

5



6



ARCHITECTURE

Justinian's ambitious quest for the creation of another church type, which led to the building of Hagia Sophia at Constantinople, surely had an influence in the provinces too, not least in Thessaloniki, the second great centre of the empire. Of course, the church built there was not absolutely the same as that in the Capital. Its form points to an attempted transition from the type of the timber-roofed Early Christian basilica to a type of cross-shaped church. That is, it still retains features of the Early Christian basilica, primarily the columns, which essentially separate the central part into three aisles.

Repairs and interventions at various times, starting from early on, even in Byzantine times, did not alter the basic shape of the square plan (excluding the conch) and the large dome. As seen today, the church of the Holy Wisdom of God consists of a cross-shaped central core, which is the church proper or naos.

This space is surrounded on three sides (north, west, south) by an ambulatory, a Π-shaped portico that communicates with the central space through openings in the corresponding sides. Thus, two branches of the portico, the north and the south, also give the impression of lateral aisles, as is the case in Early Christian basilicas. The west side of the portico serves as the narthex of the church. There are two opinions concerning the form of the west side of the church. According to the earlier view, a narrow vaulted porch, which was set on the nowadays visible foundation of the Early Christian basilica, ran along its entire length, only 70 cm. distant from the west front. According to a more recent view, on this side there was initially a wide two-storey exonarthex with staircase, a remnant of the Early Christian basilica, which was incorporated into the new church. The building's design in plan and upper structure was influenced yet constrained by the existence of the foundations of the Early Christian basilica upon which it was built. However, the solutions given bespeak the work of a proficient architect, most probably from Constantinople.[8] The cruciform central core of the church is roofed by the large dome, which rests on the four semi-cylindrical vaults of differing size. These vaults are supported by four massive

7. View of the interior towards the northeast side, with the Islamic decoration (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

8. View of the interior, towards the west side (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

9. Capital with wind-blown leaves.

10. Tectonic capital.

11. View of the central aisle.

12. View of the north aisle.

7



8



9



10



11



12



piers, through which corner spaces are formed, also of differing size. The largest of these are the two west ones, which are covered by cross-vaults. The gallery has the same Π-shaped arrangement around the central core, with which it communicates visually through the arched openings in a tri-columnar colonnade on the west side, while on the north and south sides a pier is interposed between the columns. The holy bema is appended to the east side of the church, almost as if it were an independent part. The central conch is three-sided externally, while the conches of the prothesis and diakonikon are semicircular. Side entrances from the prothesis and the diakonikon give access to the outside. At the northwest corner of the exterior of the church is a tower giving access to the galleries, which is, however, an addition dating from the Ottoman period.

This new church type gives a different sense of space. The longitudinal axis of the Early Christian basilica, with its great height, is abolished and together with it the basilica's light-filled and welcoming space. A new architectural type is created, almost square, more closed and concentrated, despite the large size of the church. Now, as believers enter the nave from the narthex their gaze is drawn immediately to the conch and then gradually upward towards the dome with its many arched windows (three on each side) and receives illumination from there. There are windows also in the conch of the holy bema and the outside walls, but because of the four massive piers the light from these is indirect and faint. It should be noted that, given the present situation of the church, surrounded by tall buildings and at a low level, due to accumulated deposits, it is difficult to appreciate the natural illumination of its interior in Byzantine times.

The dominant position of the dome signifies a different confrontation not only of the 'philosophy' of space but also of the ecclesiastical liturgy itself.

In the two important spaces of the church, the bema conch and the dome, almost the entire mosaic decoration is preserved, whereas in other spaces (narthex, galleries) only scant remnants of the wall-paintings have survived. Investigations made at various points, on the arches, in the pendentives and other spaces, occasioned by the preparation of the study for the restoration of the church after the 1978 earthquakes, produced no evidence of extensive decoration. Unfortunately, it was not possible to carry these investigations further, because preserved in the church is the Ottoman decoration of the nineteenth century, which in a way replaces the Byzantine revetment of the inner surfaces of the walls with slabs of polychrome marble.

13. The mosaic in the conch with the enthroned Virgin and Child (William Harvey, *ca* 1908).

14. The interior of the east part of the naos. Visible in the holy bema are the eighth-century cross, the later image of the enthroned Virgin and Child, and the Islamic decoration.

13



14



THE MOSAICS

The surviving mosaics, both in the holy bema and the dome, have puzzled many scholars for well over a century now and diverse theories have been proposed, mainly on the question of their dating, since it is obvious that they are not all of the same period. Conservation works carried out of late, over several years, after the 1978 earthquakes, have permitted a further examination, which will perhaps help to clarify certain issues.

15



15. The mosaic decoration on the north wall of the sanctuary vault, after conservation (painted completion by Christos Alaveras).

16. At the apex of the east arch the depiction of the cross inside a circular mandorla in the colours of the rainbow symbolizes Christ and his sacrifice.

17. The mosaic decoration on the south wall of the sanctuary with the surviving inscription of Bishop Theophilos and Empress Irene, after conservation (painted completion by Christos Alaveras).

MOSAICS IN THE HOLY BEMA

There are mosaics in the vault of the holy bema and in the semi-dome of the conch. At the apex of the vault, dominant against a plain lambent gold ground, is the circular mandorla in the colours of the rainbow, which is framed inside and outside by a thin white circular band. Within the mandorla, against a ground in shades of greyish blue, is a plain gold cross, outlined by a red band. The arms of the cross, which do not reach the circular mandorla, terminate in white drops. The arms are connected to the edge by three vertical white lines. Shining from the four points of the centre of the cross is a beam of three white rays that terminate at the edge, and so the cross and the rays divide the mandorla into eight segments. These segments are adorned with six-rayed gold ornaments (stars), which are very close to the rainbow-hued circular mandorla.

The meaning of this depiction becomes clear from the symbol of Christ, the blue of the heaven and the circular mandorla. Whether the choice of the beam of three rays as well as the three lines at the base of each arm of the cross was simply decorative or symbolized the Holy Trinity, is an open question.

To left and right below the cross (north and south part), upon the marble cornice defining the springing of the vault, there is another kind of decoration. It begins with a band in which two opposed reddish gold heart-shaped floral patterns alternate on a light blue ground and white square motifs with red dots in the four corners. The band continues all round the semi-dome of the conch. This feature, which is important, will be discussed during the examination of the mosaic in the semi-dome of the conch. Next come two bands, one plain gold and one greenish-coloured. On the ground of the gold band are monograms.

On the south side: *Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη Εἰρήνης δεσπύνης* (Lord help of lady Irene), and in running text: *ταπινοῦ ἐπισκόπου* (of humble

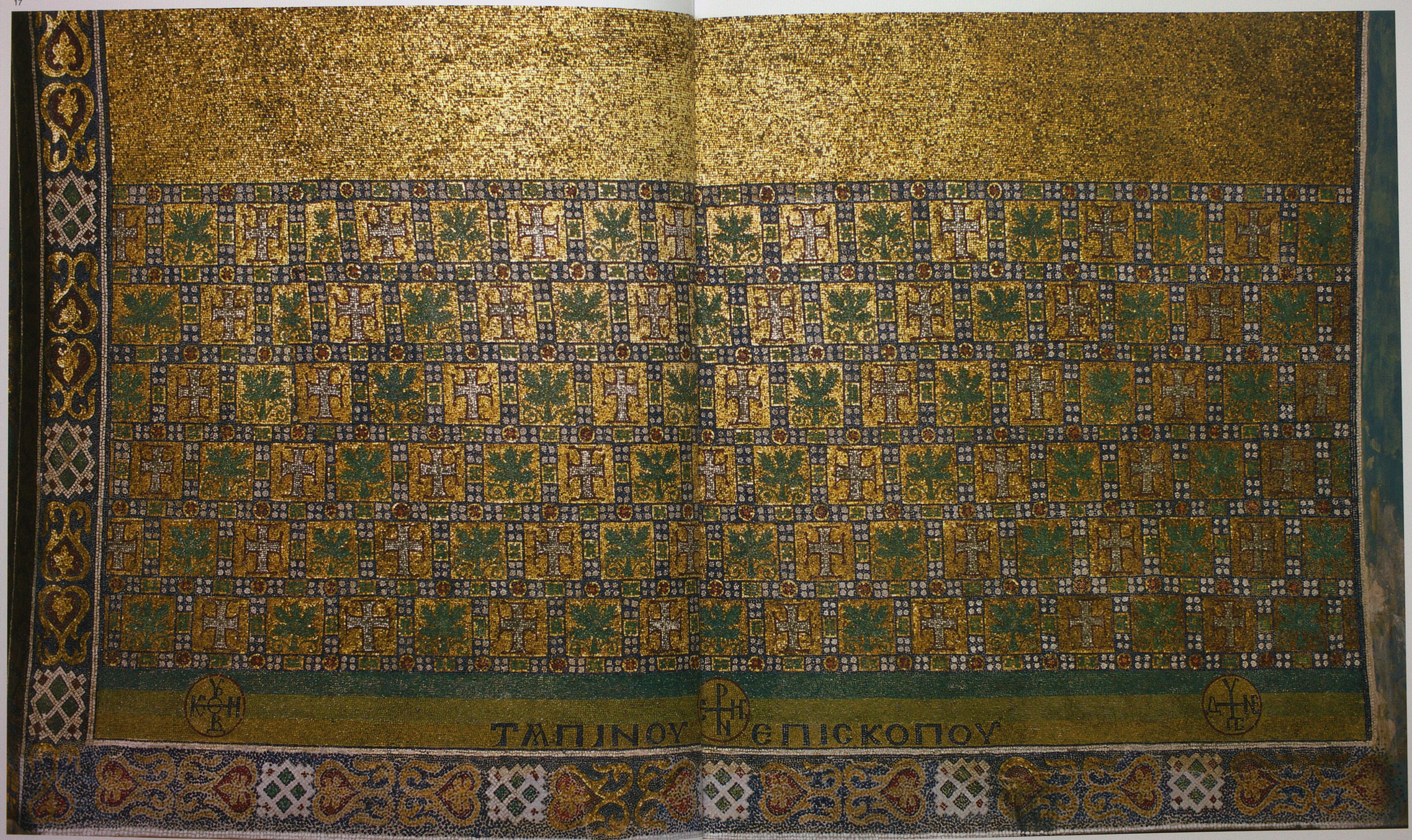
bishop). On the north side the monograms are now destroyed, but they have been read earlier: *Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη Κωνσταντίνου δεσπότου* and *Χ(ριστ)ὲ βοήθει Θεοφίλου* (Lord help of Constantine despot / Christ help of Theophilos).

Above these bands, on both sides of the vault, there is decoration in four square panels arranged in six rows. The gem-studded frames of the panels are embellished alternately with a greenish vegetal ornament resembling the tree of life and with silver crosses ornamented with precious stones.

16



17



The existence of donor inscriptions recording the names of emperors helps in the dating of this mosaic.[9] The royal persons have been identified as Emperor Constantine VI (780-797) and his mother, the co-empress Irene the Athenian (780-788 and 797-802), while the bishop Theophilos has been identified as the prelate who signed the proceedings of the VII Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787, with which Irene reinstated the veneration of icons. Irene was co-empress until 788, when she was forced to abdicate due to the reaction of iconoclast circles to her policy, but she returned as sole incumbent of the imperial throne in 797 and reigned until 802. The reference to both emperors indicates that the mosaic must have been executed between the years 780 and 788, when mother and son were co-regnant.

It has recently been proposed tentatively that the persons referred to in the inscription are Constantine V (741-775) and his wife Irene Chazara.[10] However, whether the emperor is Constantine V or VI makes little difference to the dating of the mosaic. Moreover, the first view remains the more tenable.

The question raised is why Irene and Theophilos, who followed an iconodule policy, restricted themselves to an aniconic decoration. This can be explained by the great tension that prevailed concerning the issue of the veneration of icons, which indeed, as we have seen, was the reason why Irene lost imperial authority for an interval.

THE MOSAIC IN THE SEMI-DOME OF THE CONCH

Depicted in the sanctuary conch, against an imposing gold ground, is the Virgin seated and holding the Christ-Child in her embrace.[11] This representation is not the original one. Under it there was a large cross, traces of the arms of which are still discernible above the Virgin's halo and beside her shoulders. The size of the cross indicates that it covered most of the semi-dome of the conch. The cross is considered to be –and most probably is– iconoclast, but the period of its execution is difficult to determine. Some observations made in the course of conservation works on the mosaic may contribute to resolving this issue.

Specifically, at the point where the semi-cylindrical vault joins the sanctuary conch there is the same decorative band as surrounds the decoration of the vault. This means that both the design and the execution of the mosaic in the vault and in the conch are part of a single plan and took place in the same period, sometime between 780 and 788. After this band comes a gold band, on which a dedicatory text is inscribed in large black letters of the same type as the letters on the arch: *† Πλησθη-*

σόμεθα ἐν τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς τοῦ οἴκου σου, ἅγιος ὁ ναός σου θαυμαστὸς ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ (We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, of your holy temple. By awesome deeds of righteousness) (Psalm 65:4-5).

The decoration continues with a greenish-blue band, which is surrounded by the same white band as the previous bands and is filled with a gold spiralling branch ending in ivy leaves of accomplished workmanship. This is followed by the brilliant gold ground of the semi-dome of the conch. At the base of this semi-dome and above the decorative band with the spiralling branch is another dedicatory foundation text in black letters, of the same type as in the other cases, which records: *Κ(ύρι)ε ὁ Θ(εὸ)ς τῶν π(ατέ)ρων ἡμῶν στερέωσον τὸν οἶκον τοῦτον ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀσάλευ]τον πρὸς δόξαν σὴν καὶ τοῦ μονογενοῦ(ς) σου Υ(ἱο)ῦ καὶ τοῦ Παναγίου σου Πν(εύμα)τος* (Lord, God of our fathers consolidate this house until the end of time for the glory of you and of your only-begotten Son and your All-holy Spirit). The words '*…ας τοῦ αἰῶνος ἀσάλευ…*' are missing from the

18. The enthroned Virgin with Christ is depicted against an impressive gold ground. The representation, created later, destroyed part of the earlier inscription at the base of the conch.

18



text because they were obscured or destroyed by the footstool in the representation of the enthroned Virgin.

This poses the question of what was the original decoration in the conch, which accompanied all this carefully executed and resplendent decoration on the arch. The aforementioned existence of the cross underneath the representation of the Virgin is entirely consistent with the period of Iconoclasm and the reign of Emperor Constantine VI and Irene the Athenian, whose monograms can be seen in the mosaic of the vault. Moreover, as we have seen, the type of lettering in the inscriptions is the same. We know, of course, that Irene and Bishop Theophilos were iconodules, but so great was the tension between the two factions that there was no need to exacerbate the situation

In a later period, as has been said, the cross that filled the centre of the conch was replaced by a representation of the enthroned Virgin, whose footstool destroyed part of the inscription. The Virgin sits on a throne without back, her feet resting on a low footstool, the front of which is embellished with precious stones and pearls. Upon the footstool is an oblong cushion. The throne is low and wooden, with carved vegetal decoration, and embellished with precious stones and pearls. Upon it are two cushions, one purple and one pale blue, and over these is a striped white cloth with fringing. The Virgin wears a deep-blue chiton and a maphorion, with grey and brown tones. She has a large halo. In her right hand she holds a striped textile and with the left touches the left shoulder of the Christ Child sitting in front of her chest. Christ is dressed in a gold chiton with clavus and a gold himation. His right hand is outstretched in a gesture of blessing, while in his left he holds a scroll. His cross-inscribed halo reaches to the level of his mother's neck.

This mosaic, which with the striking simplicity of the gold ground

19



19. Drawing of the semi-dome of the conch with the image of the cross and of the Virgin.

20. The mosaic of the Virgin with Christ in the semi-dome of the conch. Detail of fig. 18.

20



captures the viewer's gaze, has generated much debate and various views have been expressed. Opinions on its dating range from the ninth to the second half of the twelfth century.[12] Indeed, the existence of a crack at the height of the Virgin's waist prompted the view that, on account of some damage, the two parts were not contemporary and that the lower part was earlier than the upper, or even vice-versa. However, as has been pointed out in a recent study, the traces of the arms of the cross, visible on the gold ground, negate this view and preclude the possibility of the destruction of the upper part of the mosaic.[13] Observations made in the course of conserving the mosaic have confirmed the view that the representation of the Virgin is a single and synchronic work.

The figure of the Virgin appears somewhat shrunken. This has been attributed to the presence of the marble cornice at the springing of the semi-dome, which did not leave sufficient space for a larger figure. However, it is obvious that no such reason existed, because there is ample space above the Virgin's head. Was there a conscious desire to preserve part of the cross, was the design not correct, was this an aesthetic conception of the period? These are questions still begging

21. The head of Christ. Detail of fig. 20. Christ, a pensive figure aware of what will happen, is depicted as a child and not as an infant.

22. The head of the Virgin. Detail of fig. 20. The figure's serious aspect and mien convey the Virgin's deepest thoughts and worries.

21



22



answers. Whatever the case, the aesthetic impact of the figure within the gold ground is impressive. There are no historical data for dating this mosaic, which is why various suggestions have been made. This issue will be discussed in conjunction with the mosaic in the dome, because it is essential to make some comparisons between the two mosaics, primarily regarding style.

THE MOSAIC IN THE DOME

The composition covering the hemispherical surface of the dome, above the windows, is magnificent; its subject is the Ascension of Christ.[14] This is an enormous, bright synthesis in vibrant colours, with majestic bodies and expressive faces. At the base of the representation runs a fine red separating band, above which is a zone decorated with a profusion of flowers and fruits. In the east part of this zone, close to each other, are two three-lined inscriptions in white majuscule letters on a black ground. These inscriptions have been the object of much scholarly discussion and deliberation, aimed at dating this monumental composition: this issue will be considered after the presentation of the representation.

At the apex of the dome, Christ is depicted within a circular mandorla. He sits upon an arc and steps on a hemisphere of heaven. The mandorla is held by two flying angels. Below, in a second zone, are the Apostles and the Virgin with two angels to right and left of her. The whole composition is projected against a glowing gold ground.

Basic elements of the illustration of the subject are: the division of the representation into two circular zones, of the ascending Christ above and of the Apostles below. The area occupied by the ascending Christ, at the top of the dome, is small in relation to the composition as a whole and contrasts with the very large figures of the Apostles in the lower zone. This zone is also divided notionally into two parts, the east and the west.

In the east part is the Virgin between two palm trees with two angels. There is one more palm tree correspondingly on the west side, between two Apostles. Each of the remaining Apostles stands between two olive trees. They stand upon a rocky ground of remarkable composition, with a double row of schematic, varicoloured, curvaceous outcrops, which renders the Mount of Olives, as do the olive trees. The Apostles wear a chiton and a himation, and are without halo, while there are no inscriptions of their names.

What is particularly interesting in the composition is the alternation of figure and tree –olive or palm–, and the fact that both figures and trees play an equal role.[15] Treetops and Apostles' heads are united cyclically around the mandorla, in a rare rendering.

23. The representation of the Ascension in the dome, a post-Iconoclasm work, is a huge circular composition that impresses by virtue of its size and manner of organization. The work is one of the masterpieces of Byzantine art.

24. The east semicircle of the representation of Christ ascending, the Virgin, the angels and some of the Apostles. At the base of the composition are two inscriptions.

23





25



More analytically, the subjects appear as follows:

THE ASCENDING CHRIST. Christ, with a large cross-inscribed halo, sits in frontal pose upon a rainbow and steps on a hemisphere. He wears a gold chiton and himation. With his right hand he blesses and in his left, which rests on his left knee, he holds a closed scroll. Surrounding him is a mandorla consisting of four concentric circles in white, grey, blue and lilac. His face lacks the severity with which the figure of Christ Pantocrator is usually portrayed.

It has been noted already that the figure of Christ appears compressed in relation to the figures of the Apostles. Nonetheless, this is a single chromatic composition, both in the figures and in the gold ground.

THE ANGELS OF THE MANDORLA. The angels who hold the mandorla in their raised hands are in the east part of the composition, beneath the feet of Christ and above the heads of the Virgin and the angels in the lower zone. They fly with their bodies in horizontal position in the gold ground, within a glow that suggests the idea of infinity and alludes to the divine light and the sacred energy that activates matter. There is a ribbon in their luxuriant hair and their classically beautiful broad faces are shown almost frontal. The white garments (chiton and himation), the raised wings and the movement of their legs create an airy transcendental ensemble.

25. The face of the ascending Christ. Detail of fig. 24. Characteristic of the figure are the large calm eyes gazing beyond earthly concerns.

26. The angels holding the mandorla of Christ are among the loveliest figures in Byzantine art.

27. The flying angel holding the mandorla (left). Detail of fig. 24.

26



27



28. The garland under the Virgin's feet. Detail of fig. 29.

29. The Virgin with the angels to left and right of her. The Virgin is depicted in the scene of the Ascension, even though she was not present at the event, because thus is enhanced the symbolism of her role as mediator between heaven and earth, between Christ and mankind.

30. The Virgin amidst the palm trees. Detail of fig. 29.

31. The face of the Virgin. Detail of fig. 30.

32. The angel with open wings on the left, next to the Virgin, points to the ascending Christ and holds in the left hand a herald's wand *(kerykeion)*. This is one of the loveliest figures in Byzantine art. Detail of fig. 29.

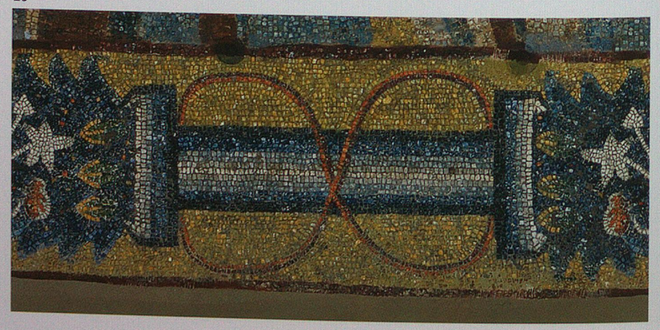
33. The angel on the right. Detail of fig. 29.

THE VIRGIN WITH THE ANGELS. As is well known, the Virgin was not present at the Ascension. However, her depiction in this subject symbolizes her role as mediator between heaven and earth, between Christ and men.[16] In the representation in Hagia Sophia she appears, as we have said, not between olive trees but two palm trees, which distinguishes her presence. She stands in frontal pose and orans, in prayer and invocation. She wears a deep blue chiton and a mauve maphorion, striped, fringed and edged in gold. From her purple girdle with gold axial line hangs a white striped cloth with grey borders and the same stripes as on the girdle. Her maphorion is embellished with a gold cruciform ornament on the forehead, the shoulders and the knees. The whole mien of the Virgin and above all her facial expression, as well as the gold ground around her, compose an idealized figure beyond the earthly world.

To left and right of the Virgin stands an angel with large outspread wings. Both angels hold in one hand a wand (attribute of a herald) with a quadrilateral finial set with a precious green stone, and raise the other hand towards the ascending Christ. Between their heads and the figures of the flying angels, written on the plain gold ground in four lines, in handsome black lettering, is the text of the Evangelist Luke (Acts of the Apostles 1:11): *Ἄνδρες Γαλιλαῖοι, τί ἑστήκατε ἐμβλέποντες εἰς τὸν οὐ(ρα)νόν; οὗτος ὁ Ἰ(ησοῦ)ς ὁ ἀναληφθεὶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν οὐ(ρα)νὸν οὕτως ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἐθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον εἰς τὸν οὐ(ρα)νόν* (Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven).

Thus, text and figures are linked in a harmonious whole. Despite the obvious, much later interventions, these figures are among the loveliest works in Byzantine art. With their easy movement, their classically beautiful faces and their exquisite coloration, they recall creations of the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

28



29











THE TWELVE APOSTLES

To right and left of the composition of the Virgin with the angels, the Apostles are depicted in an almost hierarchical arrangement. They are divided implicitly into two choirs, by the placement of a palm tree in the east and west parts. To the fore of the south choir stands the leading Apostle Peter. An elderly figure with schematic hair, short beard and big bright eyes, he holds –as is frequently the case– a cross-topped staff and a key in the left hand. The type of staff with cross finial does not allude to his martyr's death but to the victory of Christianity.[17] He is depicted in almost frontal pose and brings his right hand onto the chest, with the palm outwards, indicative of his astonishment at the event of the Ascension.

In corresponding position in the north choir stands the other leading Apostle, Paul. Although Paul was not present at the Ascension, he is depicted as a convention, on account of his role in consolidating and disseminating Christianity, and in order to underline the concept of the single and indivisible Church which continues the mission of Christ.[18] In his right hand he holds a closed purple codex, denoting his work as an author. He is portrayed bald on the forehead, in almost frontal pose and has a long dark beard. He raises his hand in front of the chest, without any gesture of surprise. His figure is serene and somewhat detached from the event. This symmetrical arrangement of the leading apostles to right and left of the Virgin, to the fore of the choirs, is almost standardized, both in later and in earlier representations of the Ascension.

In their appropriate place alongside the leading Apostles are the Four Evangelists, pillars of the Christian faith, which they spread through their writings. In the south choir headed by leading Apostle Peter are John and Matthew, while in the north choir there is a differentiation worthy of special comment. Next to Peter is John, a young man without beard, who holds a decorated Gospel-book in his left hand. His right hand is brought up to his cheek, in a gesture analogous to that of Christ's beloved disciple in the representation of the Crucifixion. The youthfulness of his figure is not consistent with the type of the Apostle-Evangelist. It is an amalgam of the two types in which he is portrayed.[19] The next Apostle-Evangelist, an elderly figure with white hair and beard, is Matthew. He holds a decorated Gospel-book in his left hand and turns towards the left. He brings his right hand up to his head, so as to have a better view of the momentous event. Apart from his iconographic type, which is known from other works, the physiognomy of his figure is repeated in contemporary and later representations, which is why his identification is certain.[20]

The other two Evangelists, Mark and Luke, should normally stand next to Paul in the other choir. However, the first-called Apostle Andrew is interposed first, after the leading Apostle. He is a middle-aged figure with dishevelled grey hair rendered in a schematic manner. He turns to the left and, like his brother Peter, holds the same red cross-topped staff in his left hand. His right hand is at the level of the thigh. Andrew is a lean figure, considerably different from the others, but can be identified easily from his particular physiognomic features.[21]

After Andrew comes the Evangelist Mark, who holds a closed decorated Gospel-book in both hands. A mature man with short hair and long forked beard, he turns towards the left. His facial features and the fact that he holds a Gospel-book facilitate his identification.

A fourth figure of an Evangelist follows, depicted, however, in a completely different way. The figure turns his back to the viewer and points with his right hand at the ascending Christ. In his left hand he holds a decorated Gospel-book, which his body almost covers. The strong features of the face (big nose, large eyes, prominent chin) are even more pronounced, due to its representation in profile. The buttocks and the legs are described clearly beneath the diaphanous garment and the rendering of the volume and curves of the body is unusual. The figure has short brown hair and a very short beard. There is no doubt that this is Luke, the fourth Evangelist, because his hair has the tonsure characteristic of his iconography. In other respects, the figure does not closely resemble known Byzantine representations of Luke. Nonetheless, there is likeness to other representations of the Evangelist in ninth- and tenth-century monuments. Specifically in Thessaloniki, there are significant similarities with the figure of Luke in the ninth-century wall-paintings in the conch of the Rotunda, despite the poor preservation of the colours.[22]

The remaining five Apostles, who are separated among themselves by a palm tree placed to the west, diametrically opposite the figure of the Virgin, are not easy to identify confidently, mainly because in this period no specific canon for depicting the Apostles is adhered to and the replacement of one by another is frequently encountered. This flexibility observed in their illustration starts from the texts, in which the names of the Apostles at the Ascension vary.[23] On the basis of other representations of the Apostles, an attempt is made to identify those present here.

34. Apostle Peter holds a cross-topped staff, symbol of the resurrected Christ. John the Evangelist portrayed as a young man rather than as the usual elderly figure, recalls his figure in representations of the Crucifixion.

35. Matthew is depicted, as usual, as an elderly figure. He holds a Gospel-book, alluding to his work as an author.

36. Apostle James deep in thought.

34



35



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37-40. The faces of the Apostles James and Simon, and of the Evangelists Luke and John. Distinctive are the big bright eyes.

41. The apostle depicted is perhaps Simon, as deduced from his facial features.

42. Apostle Philip, a young figure, holds in his left hand a scroll and with his right points towards the ascending Christ.

43. Apostle Thomas.

44. The apostle depicted is perhaps Bartholomew. Peculiar is the rendering of his head, as he tries to see the ascending Christ.

45-46. The Evangelists Mark and Luke.

47. Apostle Andrew holds a cross-topped staff. Apostle Paul holds a codex, alluding to his work as an author.

48. Part of the attire of Apostle Philip.

49. Part of the attire of Evangelist Matthew.

To left and right of the palm tree, which stands in the west, are two Apostles who are relatively easy to identify. Each is in a different pose but both turn three-quarters towards the palm tree. Common trait is their youthfulness. Beardless and with short hair, they have been identified as Thomas and Philip because this is the type in which they appear in the later iconography too.[24]

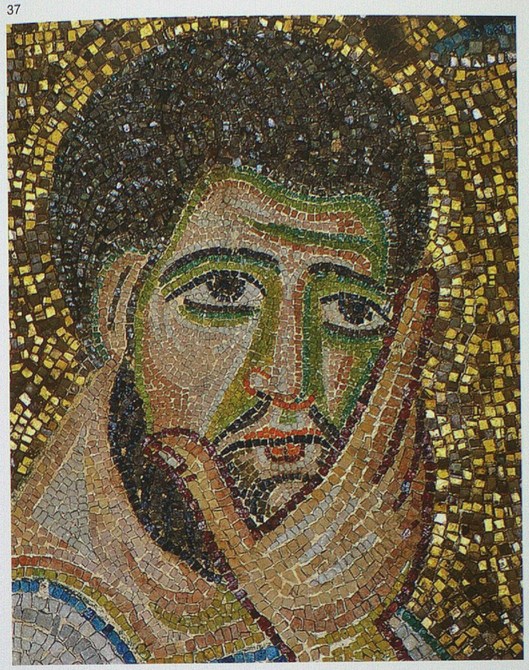
Thomas holds a closed scroll in his left hand. Distinctive is the gesture of his right hand, which touches the right part of his face. His head is turned upwards, to behold the spectacle. He is a calm figure with a broad face, big nose and little mouth.

Philip also holds a rolled scroll in his left hand and raises his right hand in front of his chest, pointing with his index finger at the ascending Christ. However, his serene pensive face and his eyes are not turned in this direction.

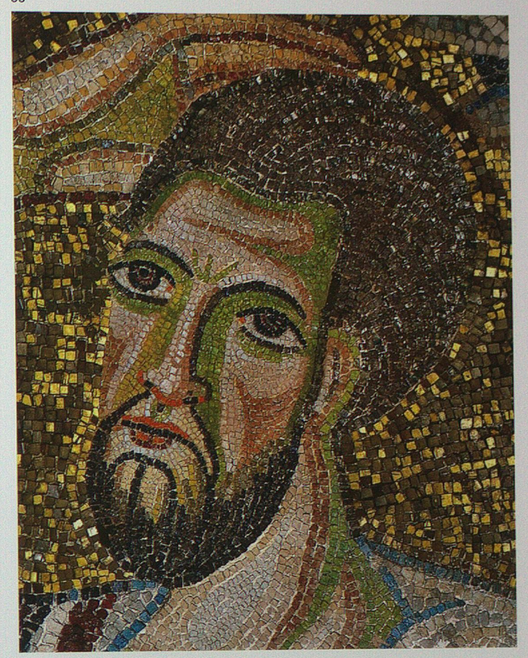
Philip is followed by two Apostles who resemble each other in many ways. The one nearer Philip stands with his weight firmly on the left leg and the right leg a little way to the fore. He turns very slightly towards the Apostle opposite. In his left hand he holds a closed scroll, while his right hand is raised, the palm resting on the right side of his head. Three wrinkles between the eyes give the countenance a thoughtful expression. The hair is short and black, and the Apostle is bearded. In all probability it is Simon. Adjacent to him is yet another Apostle, who stands on his left leg, to the fore, while the right one is relaxed. He turns slightly towards Simon. He holds a closed scroll in his left hand and he raises his right to the face, covering most of its left side. His physiognomy, as known from other representations, leaves no doubt as to his identity. He is the Apostle James, as known from the wall-painting of the Ascension in the Rotunda and from other later representations.[25] In any case, James is a type analogous with Simon and Bartholomew, as they appear in representations of the Ascension.[26]

The other Apostle in the north choir should probably be identified as Bartholomew, because he resembles Simon but has a lower forehead and a round beard. He stands and turns towards the Evangelist Luke, his legs apart, with the right one slightly bent, and his feet on the rocks. His arms are at the side of his body and in his left hand he holds a closed scroll. Particularly interesting is the rendering of his face, since his head is almost at right angle to the neck, as he strains to see the spectacle or to express his amazement.

37



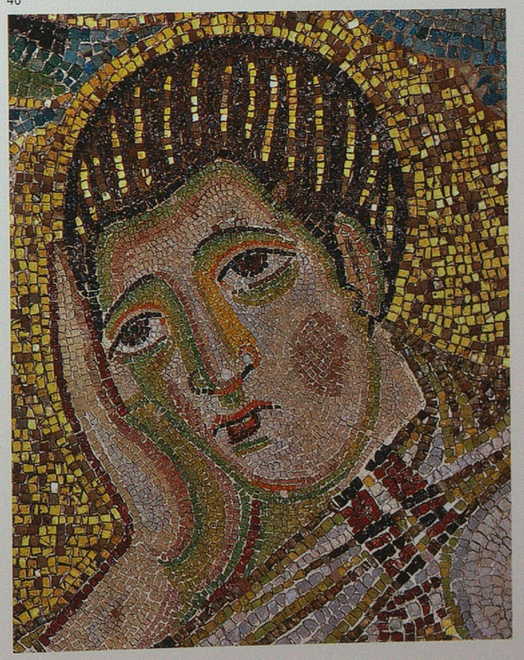
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ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

In terms of iconography, the representation of the Ascension is considered one of the most representative examples of the purely Byzantine type, as this was elaborated fully after the Triumph of Orthodoxy and as it is known from works in the minor arts as well as in monumental painting, particularly in Cappadocia.[27] Differentiations exist in these representations too, which are due in large part to the subject's position in the church.

Of the known representations, the one in Hagia Sophia at Thessaloniki is the most freely developed in the space, in comparison with the representations from Early Christian times to the tenth century. It has been noted already that the subject of the ascending Christ occupies a smaller area than the figures of the Apostles in the lower zone. This shows that the figures of the Apostles dominate. The isolation of each figure by the two trees to left and right of it gives the impression of an icon. An important iconographic element is the equal weight attached to the depiction of the landscape (in other words, aniconic decoration) and the figures, which is not encountered elsewhere in this form. On the other hand, there is a clear endeavour to render specific physiognomic features of each apostle. This endeavour is made because among the arguments of the iconodules 'likeness' is the essential justification for depicting a holy person. It is through the likeness that the divine grace of the original is transmitted to the icon, a theory that was developed in particular in iconodule circles.[28]

Saint Andrew holds an important place in the mosaic. As we have seen, he stands immediately after Paul in the hierarchy, and the Evangelists Mark and Luke come after him. Andrew is shown holding a cross-topped staff, just like Peter. This staff (actually a large Latin cross) is a diacritic sign accorded to a very small number of saints in the Early Christian period and bears no relation to the martyrs' cross, which is small. John Chrysostom, in his encomium for the Apostle of the Nations, sees Paul holding, in analogy to the earthly imperial triumph, '… sign … not of the earthly king, but the cross, of the heavenly Christ'.[29]

It is well known that for ecclesiastical-political reasons Peter, Andrew's brother, is extolled by the Church of Rome, by the cross and the *Traditio Legis*. The meaning of this cross is to extol the persons who hold it. It is the same as the gem-studded cross-trophy that Christ holds in Early Christian art shortly after the mid-fourth century, as symbol of victory in scenes of triumphal content. This is in accordance with the models of imperial iconography, which from the reign of Constantine the Great represents the emperor holding the 'victory-giving sign' *(νικοποιόν σημείον)*. In other words, a parallel is drawn between the earthly kingdom and the heavenly, the celestial realm of Christ with the terrestrial. Christ carries the cross-trophy with which he triumphed over death, as 'symbol of kingship' and as 'trophy of victory over adversaries'. This symbol of the triumph of the resurrected Christ is also held by Peter, who was distinguished more than all other Apostles as continuer of the Lord's earthly work. For this reason, the cross does not imply the means of his martyrdom.[30]

To counterbalance this, the first-called Andrew is extolled by the Church of Byzantium, as Peter also, with the same sign. This promotion commenced in 365, in the reign of Constantine II, when the emperor had the saint's relic translated and deposited in the church of the Holy Apostles. Shortly afterwards, the tradition that the saint founded the Church of Byzantium, that is of Constantinople, was created.[31] This iconographic detail in relation to the two fraternal apostles (Peter and Andrew) originates from Constantinople and is associated directly or indirectly with the city.

The extolling of Andrew's position in the hierarchy and his depiction with the cross are an element linked with the ecclesiastical-political events of the period in the imperial capital.[32] Specifically, a major issue in the second half of the ninth century was the conversion to Christianity of the Slavs, the proselytism of whom was claimed by both the Eastern and the Western Church. The religious issue that was reopened had essentially political dimensions, since the Pope of Rome wanted to revive the former grandeur of the Western Church by extending its authority to Illyricum, which had been subordinated finally to the Church of Constantinople in 731/2. Byzantium emerged as victor in this religious and political conflict, thanks to the well-known policy of Patriarch Photios, and the religious, political and cultural map of the region was formed to Byzantium's benefit. This event was of paramount historical importance for that period, as well as for the centuries to come. Outcome of this victory was the exacerbation of rivalry between the two Churches. Within this climate, the Pope emphasized the primacy of the Church of Rome, which was founded by Peter, and cast doubt on the Patriarchate of Constantinople, saying that the Church of Byzantium-Constantinople had not been founded by any apostle. For this reason, slightly earlier but particularly during the ninth century, the Byzantines stressed for their part that the Church of the city of Byzantium,

Constantinople, was founded by the first-called Apostle, Andrew. Debates on these matters, particularly in monastic and ecclesiastical circles, were heated and surely influenced iconography as well.

However, in addition to the iconographic elements, the stylistic traits are also of help in understanding the work.

STYLISTIC TRAITS

The composition is impressive not only by virtue of its size, but also by virtue of its organization. In the upper zone with the ascending Christ, the flying angels with their coloration, grace and plasticity of movement, help to create contrasts that attract the viewer's attention, not least the contrast between the mobility of the angels and the static rendering of Christ.

However, what is truly impressive in the composition is the rendering of the Apostles in the lower zone. This subject, which we see in other representations –sometimes very static and sometimes with unequal distribution– has here a clear and considered organization. The painter who conceived and designed the composition seems to have studied well not only the space but also the elements he would use, in order to depict the subject in the form it acquired after Iconoclasm.

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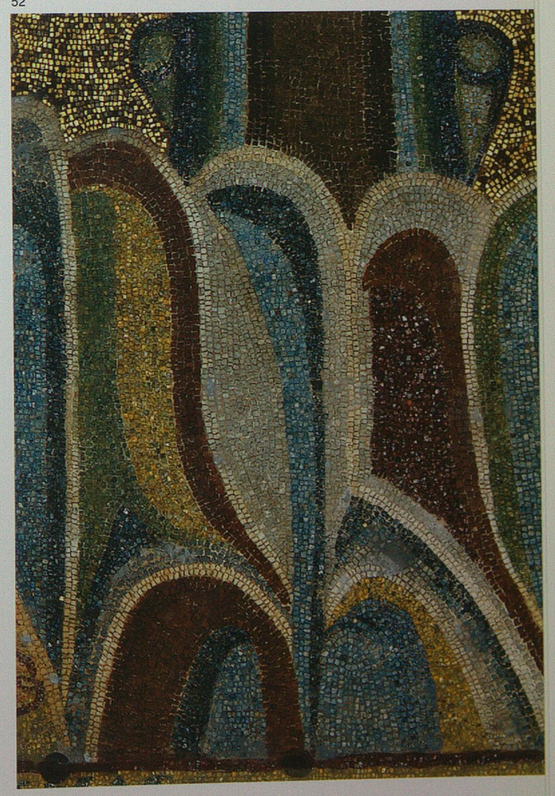
In the lower zone he left the entire surface free, in order to develop trees and figures, and to create a composition on the basis of these elements. The result of this organization is an absolutely balanced, calm, transcendental composition, which is not disturbed by the expressive gestures of some Apostles. In no other surviving representation is there such an organization of space. The trees are usually higher than the Apostles and form a kind of comfortable frame for the figures. Their rendering, despite the fact that they are schematic, shows that the mosaicists who executed them were experts. The same is true of the rendering of the rocky landscape at the base of the composition, with the rocks on two levels in strong colour tones. The rocks function autonomously as a painting and bring to mind modern concepts on painting, as expressed in the twentieth century.

Likewise autonomous is the function of the depicted figures. Although they belong to one ensemble and participate in one event, the depiction of each is almost in the type of an icon. As an ensemble they participate in the rhythm of the composition, but as individual figures they are differentiated to varying degrees. Some are more static and stern, others are lighter and airier, and others surpass the established models of the Byzantine Age. Although their quality is such that we cannot use the characterization 'classical' and 'anticlassical', we could say that, depending on the figures, we see a differentiation in concepts. We are not certain whether this differentiation is due to different craftsmen or whether it indicates the parallel application of different concepts in the same mosaic. The austere alternates with the innovative. Moreover, it appears that the whole work was designed as a single whole, not only in the conception of the alternation of tree and figure, but also in the use of movements, gestures and means of expression in the figures, in order to create this unity. It goes without saying that a work such as this was not made by one person. The employment of assistants, and indeed adept ones, presupposes the existence of a workshop, and indeed an organized one. However, if we compare the rendering (use) of the landscape and of the figures, we would say that the mosaicists

50-51. Details of olive trees.

52. Detail of the rocky landscape of the Mount of Olives.

52



display an obvious ability in using landscape, something that shows we are very close to the precepts and the perceptions of Iconoclasm.

Common stylistic traits are the introspection of the figures, whether static or moving. Their portrayal brings to mind ancient philosophers. The disproportionate bodies (very long lower body) cannot be attributed to inability on the part of the artists but is actually a correct concept, because the work is seen from the floor of the church. The schematization of the drapery of the garments and of the hair is most pronounced, with bold outlines. The long hands are well drawn, as a rule. The faces have long bulky noses, small foreheads and mouths, large expressive eyes with a metallic clarity in the pupil. Drapery, faces and hands are rendered with bold outlines. These traits are characteristic of painting in the ninth-tenth century, as known mainly from manuscript miniatures, because very few works of monumental painting of this standard survive.[33]

The wealth of colours against the gold ground, in combination with the use of fine glass-paste tesserae, gives a completely painterly sense, because colour is imposed on line when the work is viewed from afar. Thus, the congregants who beheld the mosaic from below had before them an enormous bright and optimistic composition, which elevated them visually and emotionally to the dome, the heaven on earth, where the Godhead dwells.

The person who commissioned the mosaic or the artist who undertook its execution gave form to the conception of the work, capturing and conveying its meaning and content. Here, however, we have a rare expression of content and craftsmanship, and the effort produced an enduring work, a classical work for its period and for subsequent periods, a work of global appeal.

It is only natural for us to ask who made this great work. But the mosaicist has left no signature, so his name and his provenance are unknown. Was he from Thessaloniki or was he from elsewhere? This will remain an open question. After all, what is important is that the education manifest in this work is evidently Greek Christian and of high standard. Other important considerations are to whom those who planned the making of such a magnificent work addressed it and what were its aims. Because, beyond the known fact that the Byzantine work was addressed to God, we should also bear in mind that it was addressed to men too, as a kind of teaching of the faith and a kind of aesthetic education.

Did such workshops exist in Thessaloniki in the period, as they did earlier? The sources are of little help on this issue. Nevertheless,

we cannot imagine the work completely cut off from its place. Thessaloniki had a great tradition in making mosaics, as works of various periods preserved in the city demonstrate.

Earlier researchers had associated the work with Constantinople, because of the high standard of its art,[34] but the works surviving in that city are few, making judgement difficult. Most helpful in this direction is the figure of Luke, with its totally radical representation, not because the Evangelist is shown from behind (this exists in Byzantine

53. Apostle Peter. Detail of the figure. Characteristic is the large palm of his hand, a common element in the depiction of all the Apostles.

53



art), but because he surprises with the pronounced torsion of his body (Hellenistic concept) and the diaphanous garment beneath which his rear is freely described, an unorthodox approach to depicting an Evangelist, while the intense, strong turn of the face surprises too with the power of its expression. Are these elements that we see elsewhere? Certainly not in the works that have survived. One thing is certain, that the representation points to a revival of models of Classical Antiquity and the Hellenistic period, in another assimilated form. This concept links the mosaic with the so-called Macedonian Renaissance, which commenced in this period and continued until the tenth century. This renaissance/revival is a phenomenon that is observed more clearly in illuminated manuscripts from the imperial workshops,[35] which relation leads us directly to the imperial art of Constantinople. But what exactly this relation is cannot be defined precisely.

DATING

As is apparent from what has been said, Hagia Sophia was historiated in various periods. The problems raised with regard to the mosaic decoration and its dating are far from few. The only dating that can be considered certain is that of the mosaic in the sanctuary vault, on the basis of the monograms of Emperor Constantine VI and his mother Empress Irene. Even for these another view has been suggested, with every reservation –as has been said already– which shifts the execution shortly earlier, in the first period of Iconoclasm. However, the prevailing view is that they were made between 780 and 788.

The question of when the cross in the conch was executed cannot be answered on the grounds of stylistic analysis, because what can be seen after the depiction of the Virgin leaves little leeway for study. Even so, the whole composition together with the inscriptions and the texts are indications that the cross was made in the same period as the mosaic in the vault, that is, between 780 and 788.

The depiction of the Virgin with Christ in the conch, which, as we have seen, is clearly later than the mosaic on the vault, since it destroys part of the inscription –a text of 780-788 at the base of the semi-dome–, has been dated from the ninth to the twelfth century.[36] After the ascertainment that this is a single representation and that the torso is not differentiated from the lower part, as was formerly believed, it remains to be examined whether this representation is contemporary with that in the dome

Those who support the view that the mosaic of the Virgin is dated in the ninth century base their argument on the similarity to the rendering of the Virgin and the rendering of Christ in the Ascension, in type, bodily proportions, style and technique.[37] Indeed, they associate it with the Virgin in the conch of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, of 867, despite the fact that this mosaic differs in size and quality. They suppose too that interventions were made to the work, which have altered the whole. This hypothesis is very possibly well grounded, because we know that in the twentieth century too, conservation works/interventions were made even to the mosaic in the dome, but for which there is no information.

With regard to the issues raised, it should be noted that the proportions of body to head of Christ in the dome and of the Virgin in the vault are in fact the same, as are the broad head with the very large halo, the big eyes and the broad nose. There is, of course, dif-

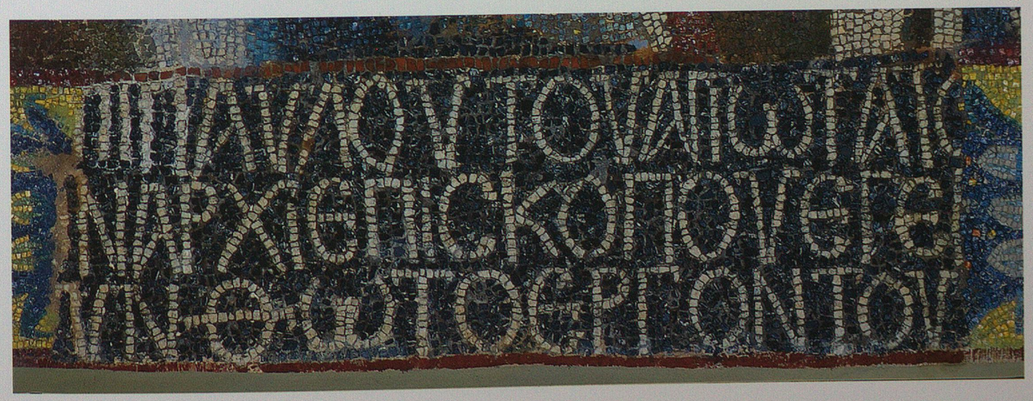
54. The inscription on the representation of the Ascension, with the date.

55. The inscription with the name of Archbishop Paul.

54



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ferentiation in the rendering of the mouth, which is just like that of the Virgin in the Princeton codex Garrett 6, which is dated in the second half of the ninth century.[38] Other differentiating characteristics are the dark coloration and the lack of understanding of light and shadow at certain points, such as the big brown brushstrokes on the mauve of the maphorion, which may be due to conservation interventions in the twentieth century or to earlier ones. However, the large elegant hands of the Virgin are drawn in the same way as those of the Apostles in the dome.

On the basis of these remarks and the fact that the representation of the Virgin does not belong to two periods but is a single work, we can say rather confidently that it must have been made at about the same time as the mosaic in the dome, a little earlier or a little later in the second half of the ninth century, but by a less accomplished craftsman. The dating to the eleventh or twelfth century is not compatible with the stylistic concepts of this work. Unfortunately, there are no further elements, and so there will always be a question hovering over this work, whose suggestive atmosphere is enhanced by the brilliant gold ground of the conch, symbolizing the divine light.

There is no historical information on the creation of the great mosaic in the dome. Sole clues to its date are the two three-line inscriptions preserved in the east part of the decorative band that runs round the composition of the Ascension, at the base of the hemisphere and referring to Archbishop Pavlos. These inscriptions have been a contentious issue in earlier and recent scholarship. Two views about them have been proposed: According to one view, the inscriptions are contemporary with the mosaic, according to the other they are earlier than the mosaic. The earliest dating proposed on the basis of the surviving truncated date 6000 years since the creation of the world, which is written in the north inscription, and the mentioned fourth indiction, is 495, or, on the basis of the Early Byzantine dating, 495, 510, 540, 570 and 690. That is, they were considered to belong to an earlier period and were kept in the decorative band when the subject of the Ascension was executed.[39] According to another view, the decorative band and the inscriptions are earlier than the representation of the Ascension, with preferred year 690, in which case the building too could be dated to this period.[40]

These views were based on the ascertainment that some letter or letters are missing from the date 6000 since the creation of the world, because the fourth indiction does not correspond to that year. This generated arguments concerning its completion. The completion was also based on the observation that there is room for only one letter in the frame of the inscription, but no frame survives to right and left of

the inscriptions. Recently, it was proposed that there were three more letters next to the surviving *S*, in cruciform arrangement, with hypothetical letters giving the date 840.[41] In this way the inscriptions have been linked with an iconoclast representation that must have been made during the episcopacy of Leo the Mathematician. According to this argument, the decoration may have been destroyed in the earthquakes of 896 –although these struck Veroia not Thessaloniki– and 925 in the Chalkidiki Peninsula.[42] So, this view does not rule out the possibility that the mosaic of the Ascension was made in the first half of the tenth century.[43]

Because this is an open question, which will continue to preoccupy research, we present here observations made over the last few years, on the occasion of the conservation of the mosaic.

Three hypotheses have been posited to date:

1st hypothesis: The inscriptions pre-existed and were incorporated in the later garland. In this case the question is raised as to why the painter did not incorporate the two inscriptions tastefully. There is one design in all the rest of the garland, which is divided symmetrically into four parts with one cylindrical ornament, to right and left of which is a floral motif terminating in three vermilion dots, leaving a small space between the flower and the cylinder (see e.g. depiction below the feet of the Virgin and of the Apostles). In the inscriptions, the leaves intrude haphazardly into the letters, a solution that is incomprehensible in a work of such quality.

2nd hypothesis: The garland is contemporary to the inscriptions. In this case, how is the untidiness at the ends of the inscriptions justified?

3rd hypothesis: The garland, the inscriptions and the representation of the Ascension are contemporary. The first clarification that ought to be made is whether the marble tesserae of the inscriptions also exist in the mosaic of the Ascension; this is indeed the case, as has been observed already by other researchers. The second observation is that the floral motif penetrates into the remainder of one letter with half-cross-shaped (┼) marble tesserae at the end of the north inscription, a totally unorthodox solution. At the beginning of the well-preserved inscription there was also a small area of restoration with gold tesserae, which was either never completed or was destroyed again. In conservation work carried out in recent years, it was filled in with simple rigattino and the area of gold that intrudes into the black ground of the inscription was kept. At the same point there is an intervention also in the rocky landscape of the Ascension, which cannot be justified if the work was made at the same time. Disturbance is observed also in the vermil-

ion band of the garland, which does not follow correctly the direction and the thickness of the band, as preserved in the remaining part. Replacement of tesserae was also observed. The conservators' investigation showed that at these points, as at others in the representation of the Ascension, there were interventions. Specifically, the disorder on the inscriptions and the garland was attributed to misunderstanding of both, which cannot be due to the Byzantine mosaicists but to later interventions.[44] It is not known whether these interventions were made by the French in 1908-1910 or are later, because there is no information.

This situation does not solve the problem of dating the inscription. The dates proposed are based on the observation that another letter fits or does not fit in the inscription, as the text appears today. We could accept this if there was a strict regularity of letters and lines in the inscriptions, something that is not seen even at the well-preserved beginning of the north inscription. For example, the bar of the letter *A* in the third line of the north inscription protrudes beyond the cross at the start of the text and beyond the *T* in the second line. Likewise, the preservation of traces of some letter above the date *S* possibly points to the placement of letters in two zones or in a cruciform arrangement, a practice not unknown in the Byzantine Age.

Rather than attempting one more hypothetical completion-dating of the inscription, we shall rely on the iconographic elements and stylistic traits which have been discussed above and which advocate acceptance of the view that the mosaic was executed in the second half of the ninth century and most probably in 885, a date that fits in with the fourth indiction. Archbishop of Thessaloniki at that time was Pavlos, friend of the iconodule Patriarch Photios (858-867 and 877-885), a pre-eminent figure in Byzantium.[45] Photios' work in organizing the Church after Iconoclasm, in founding and renovating churches, and in converting the Slavs to Christianity inspired many. The period also coincides with the rise to power of the Macedonian dynasty and with the so-called Macedonian Renaissance.

Within this historical framework and within the framework of the more general policy of Photios and of the emperors in this period, it was to be expected that Pavlos would undertake such a work in Thessaloniki. The prestige it was able to give and the influence it exerted on the local population, the numerous visitors and the proselytes was a clear aim of this work, for, as is well known, art aids politics. So it has remained to this day and, after its conservation, will remain for posterity, a work that belongs to the global cultural heritage.

56. Detail of the rocky landscape symbolizing the Mount of Olives, where the Ascension took place, and part of the trunk of an olive tree.

57. Detail of the foliage of an olive tree on the Mount of Olives.

56



NOTES

1 The church attracted the attention of researchers from as early as 1864 and the bibliography on it is extensive. Basic monographs are those by M. Kalligas (Kalligas 1935) and K. Theocharidou (Theocharidou 1994, with earlier bibliography).
2 Kissas 1985, 327.
3 Kissas 1986, 73.
4 Mentzos 1981, 201-220, with relevant bibliography. Theocharidou 1994, 32-39. Marki 1997, 62-71.
5 Theocharidou 1994, 195-196.
6 Studite, PG 99, line 917.
7 Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 117-149. Diehl – Le Tourneau 1909, 39-60. Theocharidou 1994, 213-215.
8 Theocharidou 1994, 202.
9 For these inscriptions see Kalligas 1935, 57 ff., Pelekanidis 1973a, 29-33, Theocharidou 1994, 196-197.
10 Velenis 2004, 77. Regarding this proposal, the same researcher observes that the reference in the mosaics to Bishop Theophilos is a constraint, because with this dating Theophilos is given exceptional longevity. Nonetheless, he does not rule out the possibility.
11 For the subject see Pelekanidis 1973a, 28-38 and Cormack 1980-1981, 111-135.
12 Pelekanidis 1973a, 38, with relevant bibliography.
13 Velenis 2004, 78.
14 Pelekanidis 1964, 337-349. Panagiotidi 1973-1974, 69-82. Ghioles 1981, 243 ff. and 261 ff.
15 Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1986, 395-399. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1992, 97.
16 Ghioles 1981, 304 ff.
17 Ghioles 1981, 329 ff.
18 Ghioles 1981, 323-327.
19 For the Evangelists see Friend 1927, 115-149.
20 Hunger – Wessel, *RbK* 1, line 494, Wessel, *RbK* 1, line 238.
21 Wessel *RbK* 1, lines 154-156.
22 Xyngopoulos 1938, 32-35, fig. 5. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1986, fig. 9.
23 Ghioles 1981, 322-324.
24 Ghioles 1981, 245.
25 Xyngopoulos 1938, 32-35, fig. 5. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1986, fig. 9.
26 Ghioles 1981, 326.
27 Panagiotidi 1973-1974, 80-82.
28 Chatzidakis 1979, 301.
29 Ghioles 1981, 149.
30 Ghioles 1981, 330, with relevant bibliography.
31 Glavinas 1986, 36.
32 Ostrogorsky 1963, 181-183.
33 Lazarev 1967, 125 ff. Chatzidakis 1979, 305. Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1986, 393-410. Guiglia Guidobaldi 2007, 119-147.
34 Pelekanidis 1964, 348-349. Panagiotidi 1973-1974, 78, with earlier bibliography.
35 Weitzmann 1963, 29 ff.
36 Pelekanidis 1973a, 29, with relevant bibliography.
37 Grabar 1957, 194 ff. Lazarev 1967, 111, nn. 32 and 115.
38 Corvigan 1997, 90-91, fig. 43.
39 Bakirtzis 1982, 165-180.
40 Theocharidou 1976, 265-273.
41 Velenis 2004, 74-75.
42 Theocharidou 1994, 30.
43 Velenis 2004, 77. Discussed in the same study is the possibility that the archbishop referred to is Patriarch Pavlos IV (780-784), a dating which accords with the dating of the mosaics in the sanctuary vault. However, there is no further comment on this association.
44 These data are published for the first time.
45 Spieser 1973, 145-148.

57





HOLY APOSTLES

2



CHRYSANTHI MAVROPOULOU-TSIOUMI

HOLY APOSTLES
(HAGIOI APOSTOLOI)

HISTORY OF THE MONUMENT

In the first half of the fourteenth century, a period when Thessaloniki was enjoying an artistic heyday and considerable influence throughout the Balkans, a splendid church, the katholikon of a monastery, was founded in the western quarter of the city. It is known today as Holy (Twelve) Apostles (Hagioi Apostoloi).[1] In Paparrigopoulou Street, north of Democracy Square, stand the remnants of the monastery gateway[2] and some 80 m. beyond is the church, an architectural 'bijou'. Very close by are the west fortification walls of Thessaloniki, while to the north is the cistern (kinsterna) of the monastery.[3]

1. The representation of the Entry into Jerusalem (see fig. 56).

2. The hymnodist Cosmas Maioumas is depicted next to the Dormition of the Virgin because his canons are chanted on this feast day.

3. The church, of cruciform plan with dome, is an architectural 'bijou' with a wealth of ornamental brickwork (northeast face).

3



The original name of the katholikon and the monastery is unknown. The present name is considered to be a nineteenth-century creation.[4] However, this view seems highly unlikely, since during the period of Ottoman rule and until the liberation of Thessaloniki in 1912, the church functioned as a mosque, named the Souk Su Cami, which means mosque of the Cold Water, probably due to the existence of the cistern.

Restoration works on the monument in the years 1926-1928 and 1940-1942, which involved the removal of Turkish plasterwork and conservation interventions, revealed that the church was not only a gem of fourteenth-century architecture but also a masterpiece of interior decoration, with high-quality mosaics and wall-paintings.[5]

The church was dated on the basis of the inscriptions and the ligatures on its west side.[6] Carved on the marble lintel is the inscription *πατρ(ι)άρχ(ης)* and *κτήτωρ* (patriarch / founder), which is framed by the letters *N* and *Φ* of the name Niphon. On the column dosserets too, proceeding from the north, is written in the form of a ligature, on the first *Νίφων* (Niphon), on the third *πατρ(ι)άρχ(ης)* (patriarch) and on the fourth *κτήτωρ* (founder). On the tympanum of the west bilobe window, the inscription is repeated with bricks, in the form of a ligature *Νίφων* and *πατρ(ι)άρχ(ης)*. The frequent repetition of the name and office of the founder emphasizes the patriarch's contribution to building the church.

The Niphon referred to is identified as Niphon I, who served as patriarch from 1310 to 1314, when he was deposed and defrocked.[7] Some scholars have doubted whether Niphon financed the entire construction or only the exonarthex on the west side.[8] However, recent studies have shown that the monument is a single construction and was erected as a whole by Niphon.[9]

The dedicatory inscription on a wall-painting in a shallow niche above the west entrance from the narthex into the nave, leads to the same conclusion. Depicted there is the enthroned Virgin and Child, and bottom left a kneeling figure with the following inscription beside it:[10]

Παῦλο(ς) μοναχὸ(ς) καὶ προϊστάμ(εν)ο(ς) τῆς σε-
βασμίας μ(ο)νῆς ταύ(τ)ης καὶ μαθητὴ(ς)
… ωτάτου οἰκουμενικοῦ πατριάρχου
καὶ κτήτορο(ς) κὺρ Νίφωνο(ς) καὶ δεύτερος κτήτωρ …

[Pavlos monk and prior of this revered monastery and disciple of the Most Holy Ecumenical Patriarch and founder Sire Niphon and second founder …]

In the inscription the hegumen of the monastery, Paul, is referred to as second founder and his relationship of discipleship with the Ecumenical Patriarch Niphon is stressed. The phrase 'second founder' *(δεύτερος κτήτωρ)* may mean either that he co-financed the building and the decorating of the church, or that he financed only the painting. The second alternative is the more likely, as is deduced from the frequent repetition of the patriarch's name in the architectural fabric of the building. Moreover, Niphon is referred to as 'Most Holy' (*ἁγιώτατος*) Ecumenical Patriarch and not as former patriarch. This title could be attributed to Niphon only in two cases: if he was still patriarch at the time the wall-painting was executed, or if he had departed this life, which possibility is of importance for dating the decorating of the monument, at least the beginning of it.

The historical sources provide some information on the personality and the activities of Niphon during his patriarchy.[11] According to these, Niphon was instrumental in normalizing relations between Emperor Andronikos II and the anti-unionist Arsenites (supporters of Patriarch Arsenios). His role reinforced his position, which is why Niphon's relations with the emperor were close. When he became patriarch, he dismissed from Thessaloniki the Metropolitan Malachias and sent as patriarchal exarch to the city the monk Kallinikos, to oversee the patriarchal buildings he himself had founded. In so doing, Niphon, who hailed from Veroia, aimed to control the income of the Metropolis and increase his power in the second capital of the Empire. This was a particularly significant move, because in the same period Irene-Yolanda Momferrat settled in Thessaloniki after the separation from her husband Emperor Andronikos II. Irene was determined to keep her hereditary rights to the region –based on the conquests of her Frankish ancestors–, to defend the rights of her four sons to the succession to the throne, and to monitor the activity of the co-emperor and heir to the throne Michael IX. Michael spent most of his time in Thessaloniki with his wife and his son Andronikos, who became emperor in 1328.

Niphon was deposed from the patriarchal throne on 11 April 1314, on the very serious charge of simony. He lost control of his foundations and, of course, was no longer able to finance the project. On the basis of these pieces of evidence, various views have been expressed on the dating of the wall-paintings. One view is that Niphon, even though he was no longer patriarch, maintained good relations with Andronikos III after 1328 and was therefore able to continue the project.[12] Even so, he could not be referred to as «*ἁγιώτατος*» Ecumenical Patriarch, since there was by then another incumbent of this office.

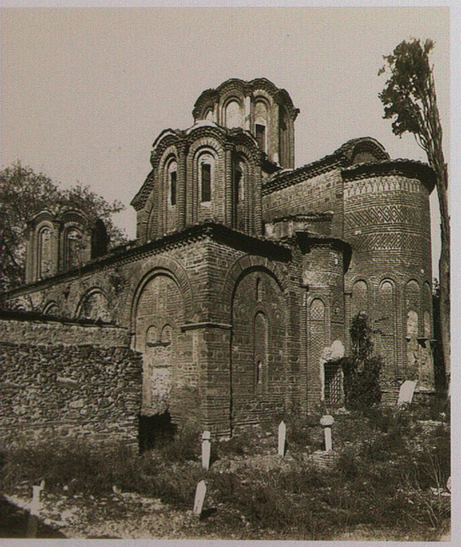
It would be helpful with regard to this issue if the original name of the church and the monastery were known. Two views have been expressed in relation to this problem. The earlier view is that the name

of the church was Holy Apostles. A church of that name did indeed exist in Thessaloniki, but it was not the katholikon of a monastery.[13] According to the other view, the church was dedicated to the Virgin Gorgoepekoos (Swift-hearing).[14] This view is based on a description by the monk Ignatios from Smolensk, who visited Thessaloniki in 1405 and mentions the existence of three monasteries dedicated to the Virgin Mary: the Peribleptos of Sire Isaac, the Nea Moni and the Theotokos Gorgoepekoos.[15] Arguments summoned in favour of this identification were the depiction of the enthroned Virgin and Child together with the 'second founder', above the entrance to the church proper; the wall-paintings of scenes from the infancy of the Virgin, in the esonarthex; the prefigurations of the Virgin in the south portico; and the representation of the Christmas hymns in the north. However, in the Palaiologan period Mariological cycles in churches, and particularly monastic ones, are common.[16] One other view, expressed

4. Southeast face of the church in the late nineteenth century (R. Schultz and S. Barnsley, 1888-1890).

5. Earlier photograph of the west face of the church. From the book *Views in Greece from Drawings by Edward Dodwell's, Esq. F.S.A. & C. John Rodwell*, London 1830.

4



5



on the basis of the dedicatory wall-painting in which the Virgin holds the infant Christ, is that the church was dedicated to both, as in the case of the Chora monastery in Constantinople.[17] While the possibility that the church was dedicated to the Theotokos cannot be ruled out, the identification as Gorgoepekoos is problematical because a Gorgoepekoos monastery existed in Thessaloniki already from March 1301, before Niphon's patriarchy.[18]

ARCHITECTURE

Holy Apostles[19] is a splendid example of a cross-plan church of the mature Palaiologan phase. This is an architectural type which aims at the dynamic development of the space around a centre, at approaching the human scale, at creating the shape of the cross in its plan and upper structure, and at enhancing the suggestiveness of the space. It has four domes, a narthex and an ambulatory, the west side of which serves as an exonarthex. Externally, the attenuated proportions and the escalation of volumes are emphasized.

The decorative brickwork, in a host of combinations (lozenges, simple or with crosses, meander pattern in various versions, herring bone motifs, crosses, simple or composite, interlaces, rosettes, schematic cypress trees, 'suns'), creates a masterwork with the wealth of subjects and, primarily, the impeccable quality of the craftsmanship.

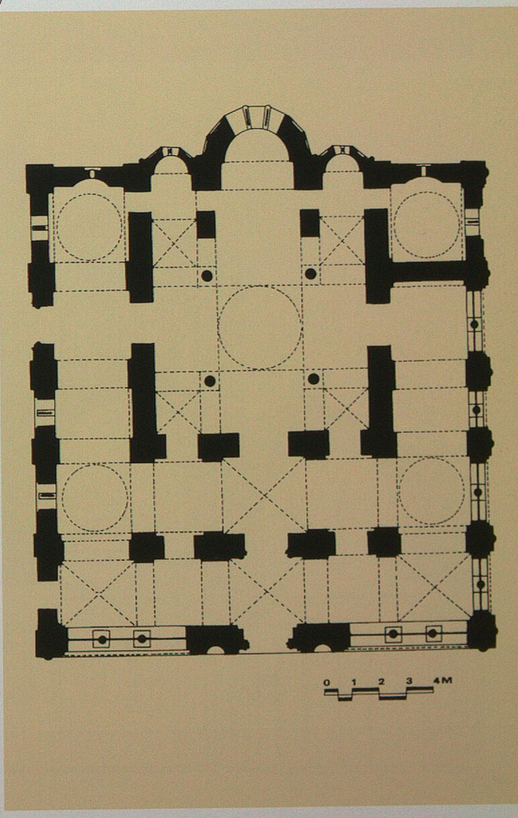
6. The northwest face of the church.

7. Ground plan of the church.

6



7



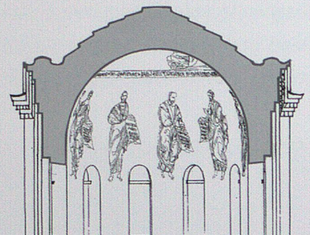
The interior of the church proper is dominated by the sanctuary and the dome, the heaven on earth, to which the believer's gaze is drawn as he enters the naos from the narthex. In the square central space, four marble columns –one at each corner– support the four arms of the cross upon which the dome sits, with the interpolation of the pendentives.

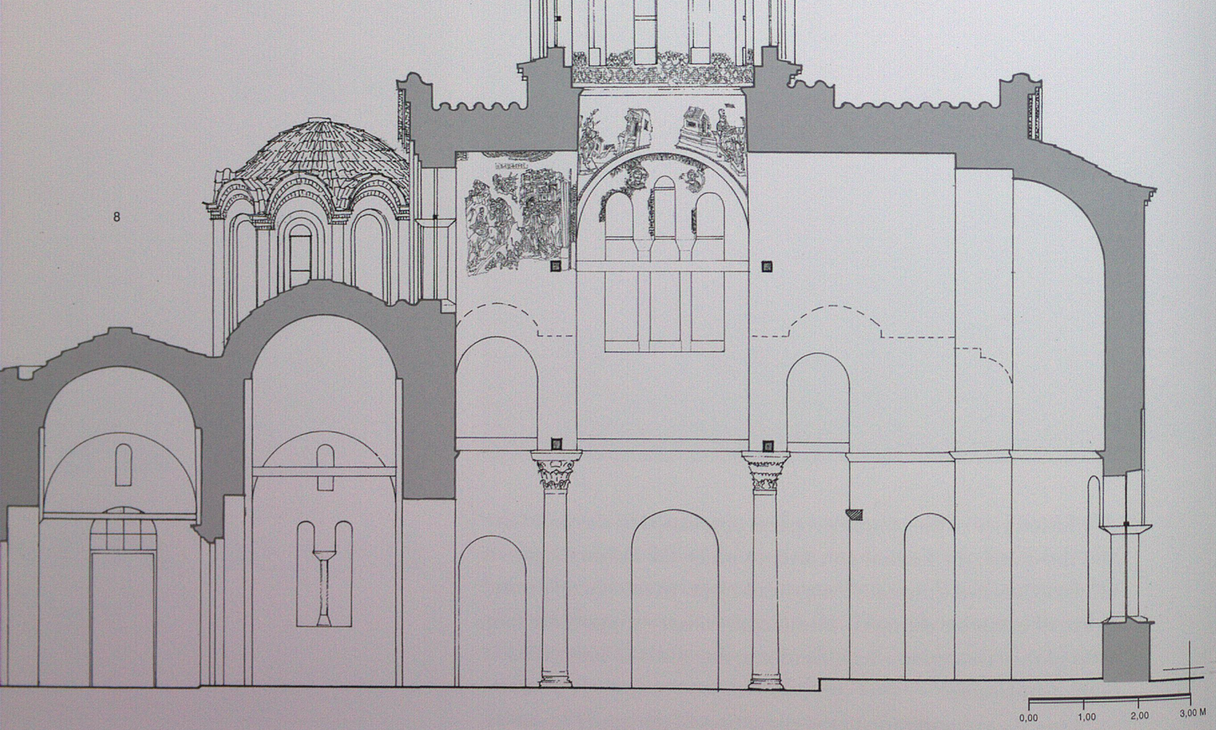
Above the column capitals the curvatures of the upper structure

8. Longitudinal cross-section to the north. Visible are the figures of the prophets in the dome, the evangelists in the pendentives and the representation of the Entry into Jerusalem (graphic synthesis and reduction of figs 8-11 by Pantelis Xydas).

begin. At this height a continuous marble cornice, which was originally painted, runs round the walls of the naos and the sanctuary, and separates the mosaics (above) from the wall-paintings (below). There is an analogous cornice at the base of the dome.

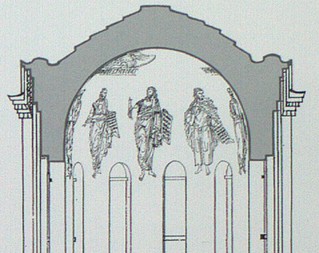
At the east end of the portico, next to the prothesis, is the side-chapel (parekklesion) of St John the Baptist, which communicates with the prothesis through an opening in its south wall. Adjacent to the diakonikon is the sacristy, which has no entrance on its west side; it communicates with the prothesis via an archway and is only accessible from inside the sanctuary.

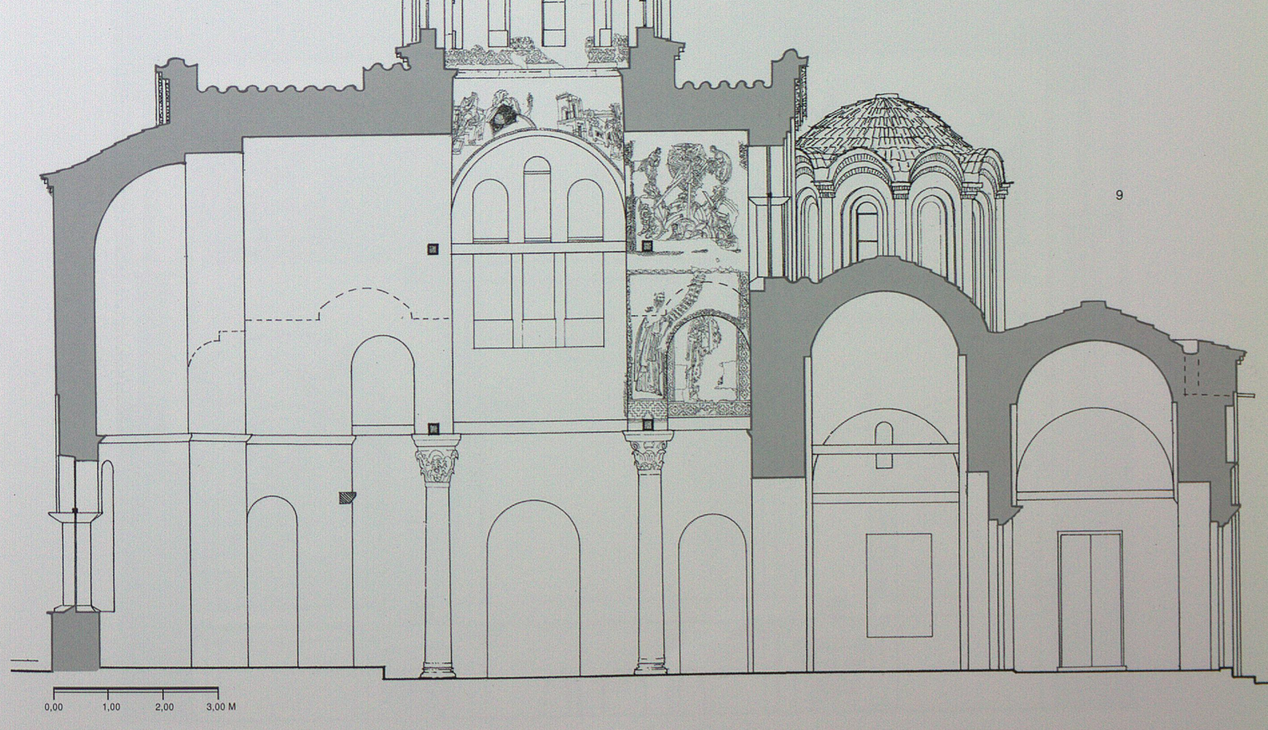


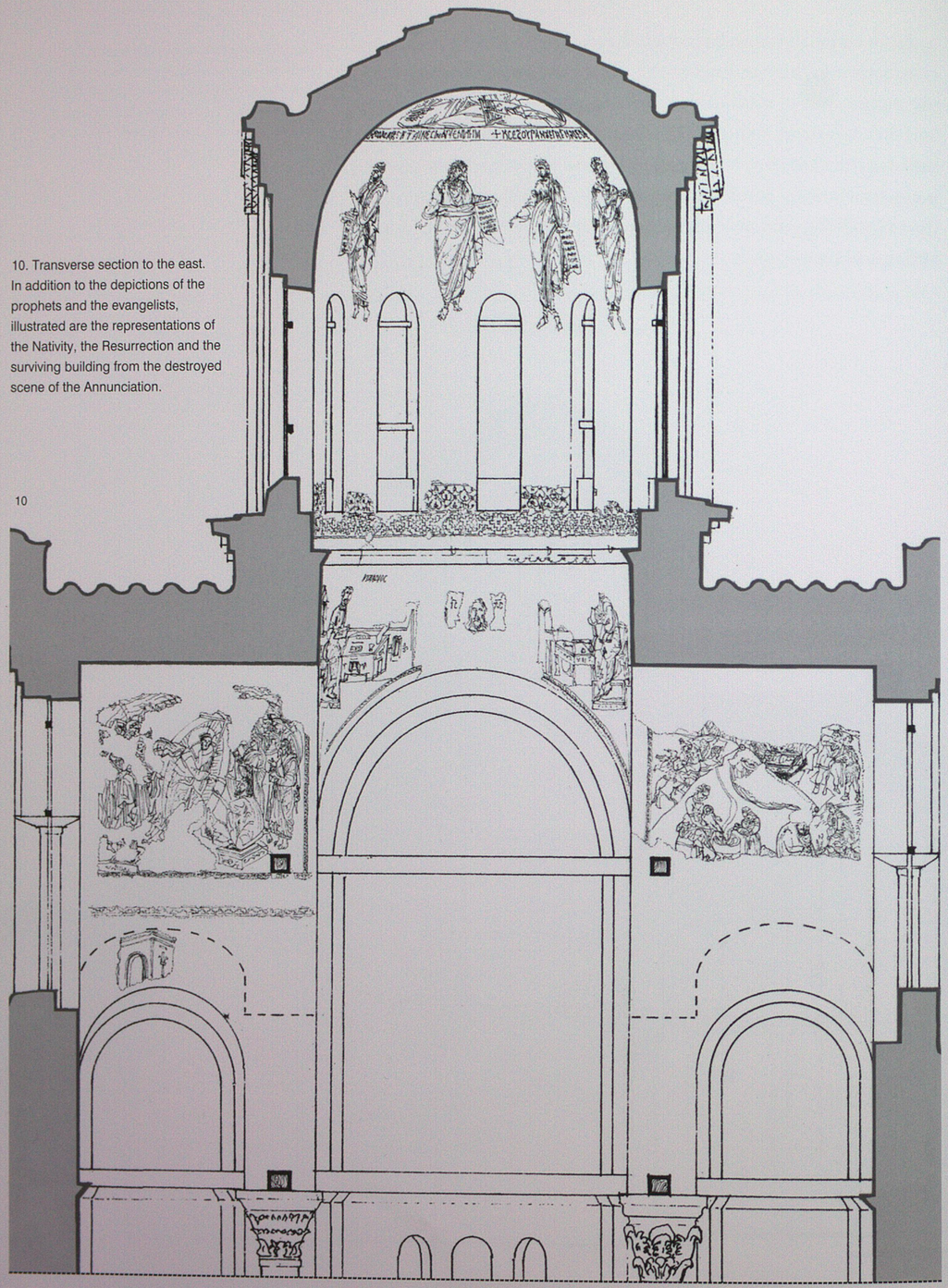


Light enters the church through the ten windows of the decahedral central dome, the windows in the sanctuary, the eight windows in the tympanum of each of the three smaller domes of the portico and through the openings in the west, north and south walls. Today, because the church is surrounded by new high-rise buildings and is at a much lower level than in the past, it is difficult to appreciate the original illumination and the reflections of light on the mosaics and mural paintings.

9. Longitudinal cross-section to the south. Rendered graphically are the prophets in the dome, the evangelists in the pendentives, the representation of the Transfiguration, Cosmas the Melodos and a male saint in a conch.

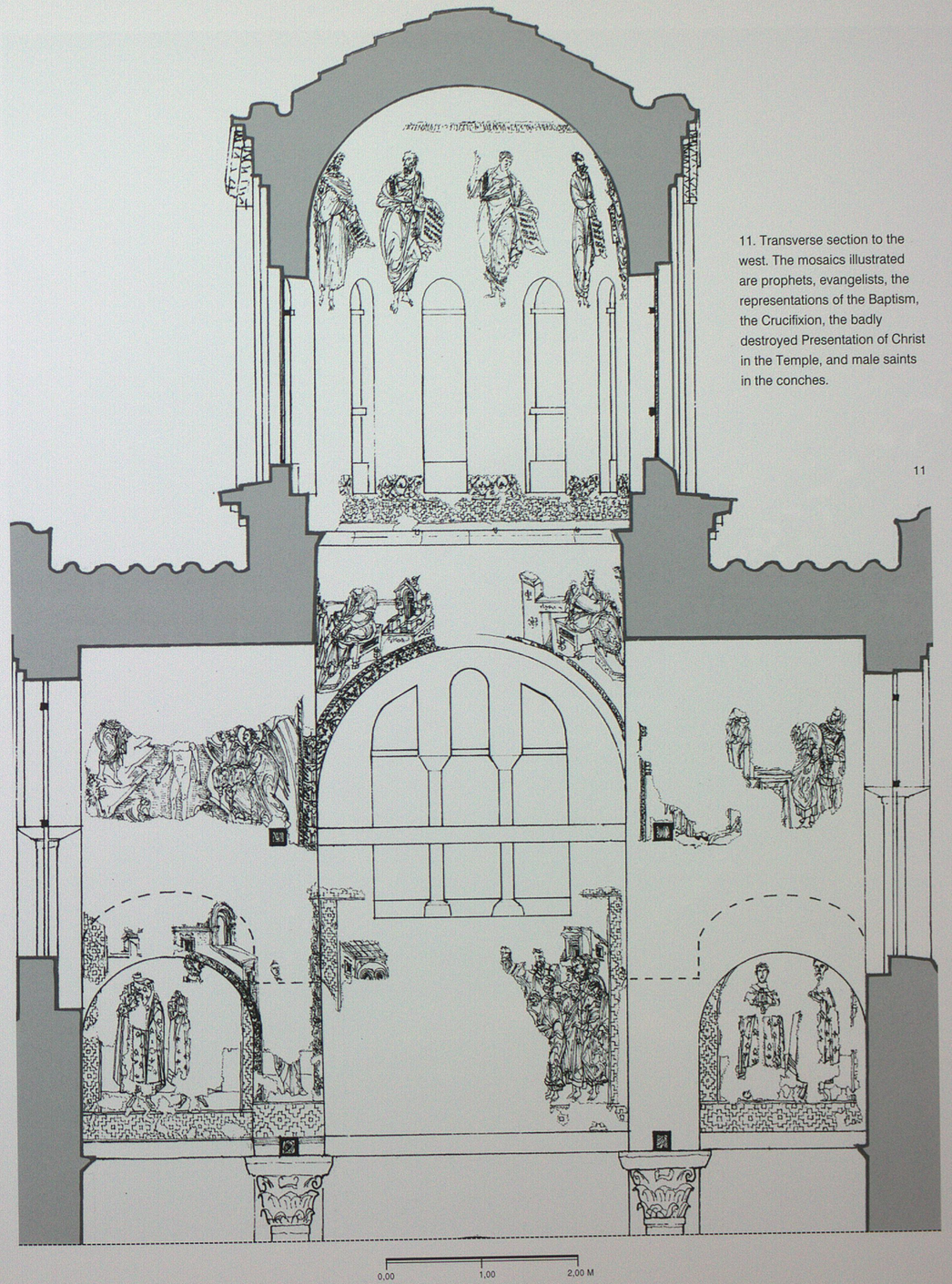






10. Transverse section to the east. In addition to the depictions of the prophets and the evangelists, illustrated are the representations of the Nativity, the Resurrection and the surviving building from the destroyed scene of the Annunciation.

10



11. Transverse section to the west. The mosaics illustrated are prophets, evangelists, the representations of the Baptism, the Crucifixion, the badly destroyed Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and male saints in the conches.

11

12



DECORATION

It had been foreseen that this architectural gem would be decorated completely with mosaics and wall-paintings, which indicates generous funding from the patron of the project. Although parallel decoration with mosaics and wall-paintings is not usual in the Palaiologan period, due to the high cost of executing mosaics, it is encountered elsewhere too[20] and bears witness to the donor's capability and intention of elaborating an impressive work. The mosaics are confined to the space of the church proper and their position is delimited by the marble cornice that runs round the naos just above the height of the column capitals; below the cornice are wall-paintings, which fill all the surfaces of the portico and the exonarthex. Mosaics and wall-paintings have suffered the ravages of time and, primarily, the effects of turning the church into a mosque during the period of Ottoman rule, when the decoration was covered with stucco. To ensure that the new coat of plaster would stick, the wall-paintings were hammered and the gold ground of the mosaics was removed almost in its entirety, while several figures were destroyed. Nevertheless, what remains is sufficient for us to appreciate the content and the quality of the work, which is why it has been suggested that the artisans who undertook the conversion were Christians who respected the representations and preserved also some inscriptions. Even so, such an extensive and systematic removal of the gold tesserae of the ground of the mosaics gives the impression that they were collected deliberately for some other use[21]. The destruction of the gold ground considerably reduces the aesthetic impact the mosaics would have, if they were preserved intact.

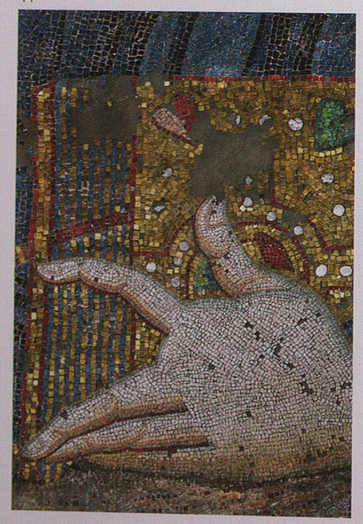
Unexpected is the fact that in the uncovering and conserving of the mosaics by the first scholar to study them, A. Xyngopoulos, no trace of mosaic or wall-paintings was found in the sanctuary conch. Whereas wall-paintings exist in the lower part of the conch, below the cornice, the upper part is devoid of decoration. This led A. Xyngopoulos to postulate that the procedure of decorating with mosaics was cut short after the deposition of Niphon and that the second founder, the hegumen of the monastery Paul, left the conch without decoration, possibly in the hope of better days.[22] This view was espoused by subsequent researchers.[23] However, it seems most strange that there are wall-paintings in the lower part of the conch yet the upper part remained without decoration, and above all that there are mosaics in all the spaces above the cornice yet the very important space of the sanctuary conch was left empty. The more likely explanation is that the decoration has been destroyed.

12. Overall picture of the central dome, showing, despite the destruction, the splendour of the mosaics. Depicted are Christ Pantocrator and the prophets in the dome, and parts of the scenes of the Dodecaorton on the arches supporting it.

13



14



13. Detail of the right hand of Christ Pantocrator in the dome.

14. The singular rendering of the left hand of the Pantocrator, holding the Gospel-book.

15. Christ Pantocrator and the prophets in the dome, without the gold ground. The prophets' legs seem to be floating, giving the impression of immateriality, a distinctive trait of important works from the early decades of the fourteenth century. The figures recall statues of ancient philosophers.

MOSAICS

THE MOSAIC IN THE DOME

For the decoration of the dome the figure of Christ Pantocrator, established in this period, was chosen for the apex, and the prophets, which encircle his figure, for the drum.[24] The subject alludes to the salvation of the soul and the Last Judgement.

Within a circular band with text from the Psalms, Christ is depicted in bust. His face is destroyed. He wears a dark blue chiton with gold clavus and a blue himation. His right hand projects from the himation in a gesture of speech-blessing. In the left hand he holds a gold-embellished Gospel-book.

The drawing of the left hand, which is inordinately large and covers most of the Gospel-book, probably was used for the first time in two imperial works, in Holy Apostles at Constantinople, of the sixth century,[25] which no longer exists, and later at Daphni.[26] This manner of drawing the hand appears, almost identical, in the early fourteenth century in monuments of the Capital, such as the Parekklesion of the Pammakaristos[27] and the Chora monastery,[28] in the Paregoretissa at Arta[29] and at Staro Nagoričino,[30] which was decorated by the Thessalonikan painters Michael Astrapas and Eutychios, which points to the repetition of early Constantinopolitan models.

The destruction of Christ's face means that its expression is unknown, however, from the inscription in the circular band it appears that the Pantocrator is rendered as Saviour and not as punisher:

> *Κ(ύριο)ς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἐπ(έβλεψεν τοῦ ἀκοῦσαι) τοῦ στεναγμοῦ τῶν πεπηδημέν(ων) τοῦ λῦσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν τεθανατωμέν(ων) τοῦ ἀναγγεῖλαι ἐν Σιὼν τὸ ὄνομα κ(υρίο)υ κ(αὶ) τ(ὴν) αἴνεσιν αὐτοῦ ἐν Ἰ(ερουσα)λήμ.*
>
> [The Lord from heaven turned his gaze towards earth to hear the sigh of the fettered, to free the sons of those who have been put to death, to announce the name of the Lord in Zion and his hymn in Jerusalem]

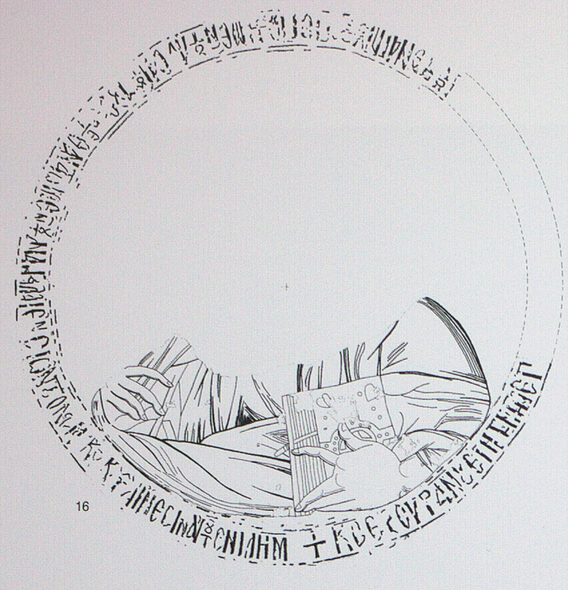
The issue of man's punishment is mentioned in the texts on the scrolls of the ten prophets[31] in the lower zone in the drum of the dome, encircling the figure of Christ. The prophets are depicted standing, without decorative or other architectural separators between them, and thus acquire a rhythmical continuity. They are depicted in pairs, facing each other, with the exception of Jonah who is shown almost frontal. Their feet, which appear to be hovering, convey a sense of the immaterial, an element found in other important fourteenth-century monuments.[32] The figures are strongly reminis-

15

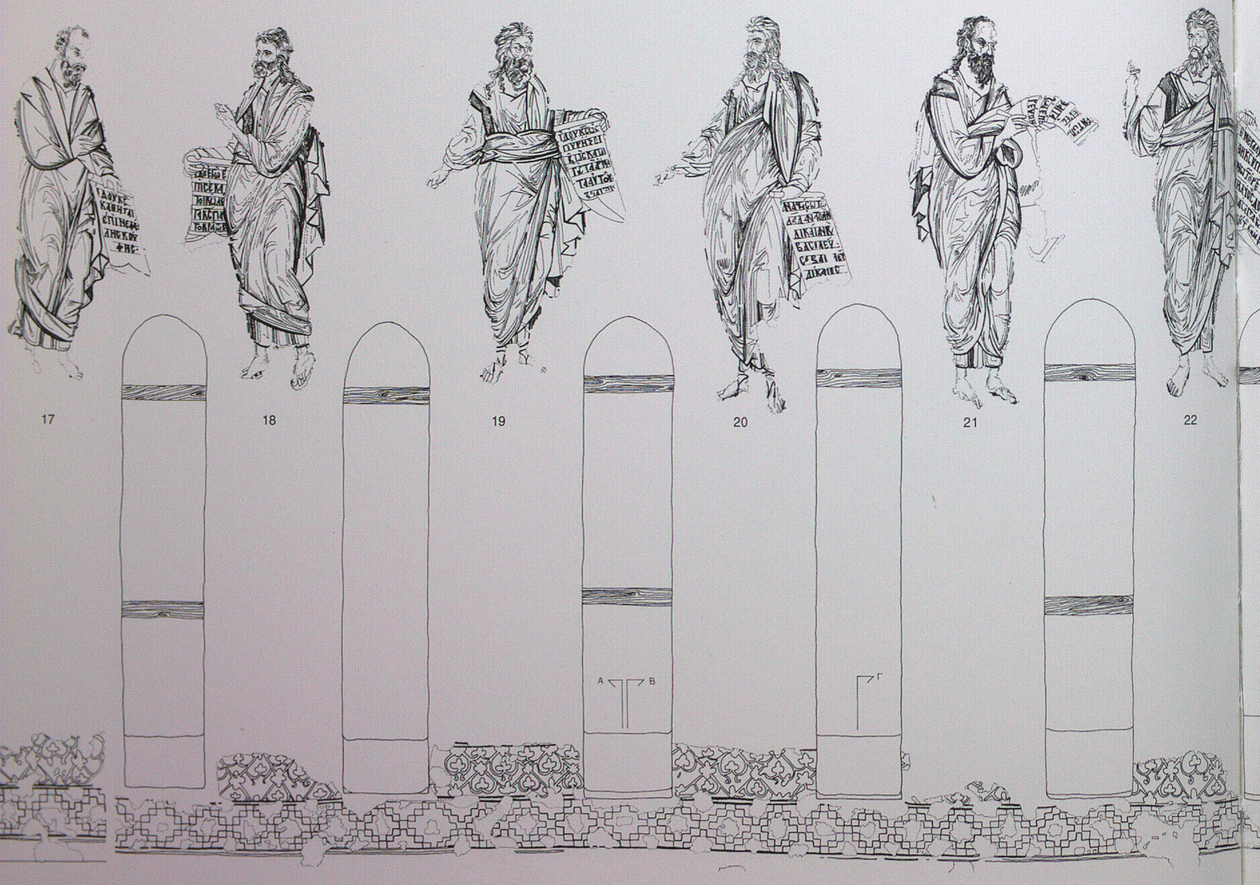


16. Drawing of the Pantocrator and the prophets in the dome (imprinted by Th. Kakagianni, with the guidance of P. Mastora and the supervision of Ch. Bakirtzis).

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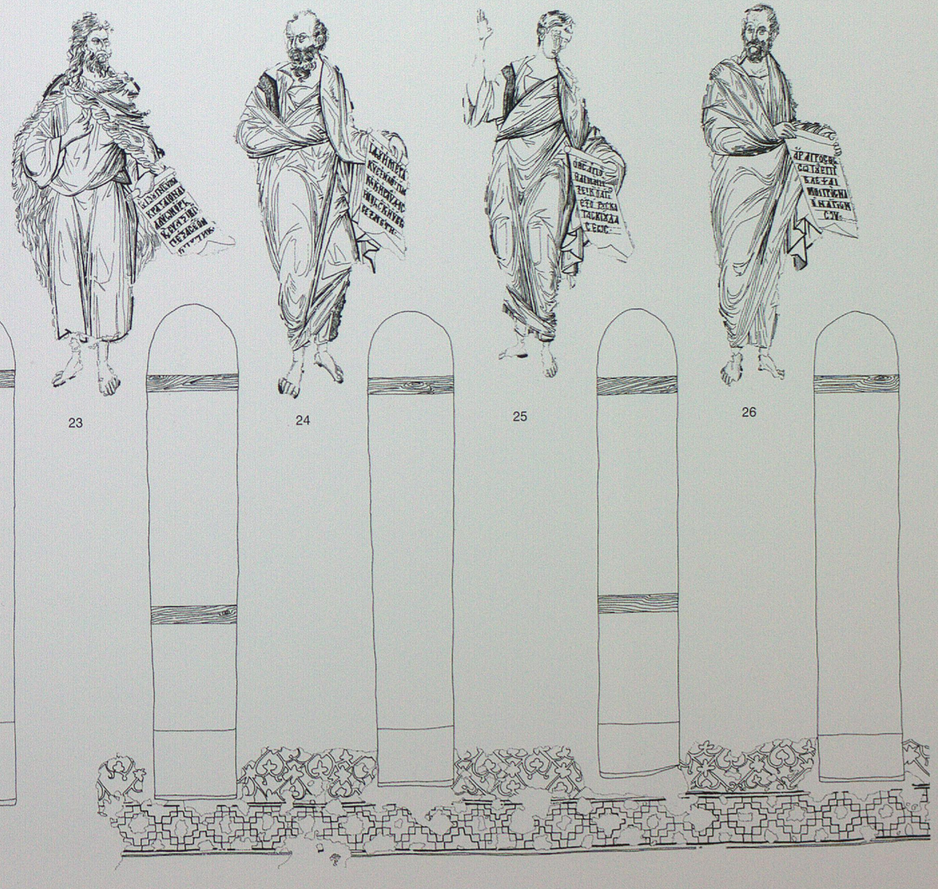
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cent of representations of ancient philosophers, both in corporeal bulk and movement, and in the rendering of the faces. Their names have been erased due to the removal of the gold ground, but they are identified by the texts of the scrolls they hold in their hands. Indeed, some errors in the excerpts have been ascertained, which have been attributed to the possibility that these were penned from memory, not on the basis of a written text.[33] Starting from the east, the prophets are, in order, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, Elijah, Elisha, Habakkuk, Jonah, Isaiah, Nahum and Zephaniah. The texts of the scrolls refer to both the salvation of the soul and the punishment at the Last Judgement. Thus, the ensemble of mosaics in the dome acquires the meaning of reminding the faithful of the need for salvation of the soul. The transcendental atmosphere of the composition overall, the cyclical arrangement and the ethereal element point to the mosaicist's ability to design and render a celestial scheme.

17. Prophet Isaiah.
18. Prophet Nahum.
19. Prophet Zephaniah.
20. Prophet Jeremiah.
21. Prophet Ezekiel.
22. Prophet Malachi.
23. Prophet Elijah.
24. Prophet Elisha.
25. Prophet Habakkuk.
26. Prophet Jonah.
27. Prophet Ezekiel (detail).
28. Prophet Elisha (detail).
29. Prophet Zephaniah (detail).
30. Prophet Nahum (detail).
31. Prophet Elijah (detail).
32. Prophet Jonah (detail).



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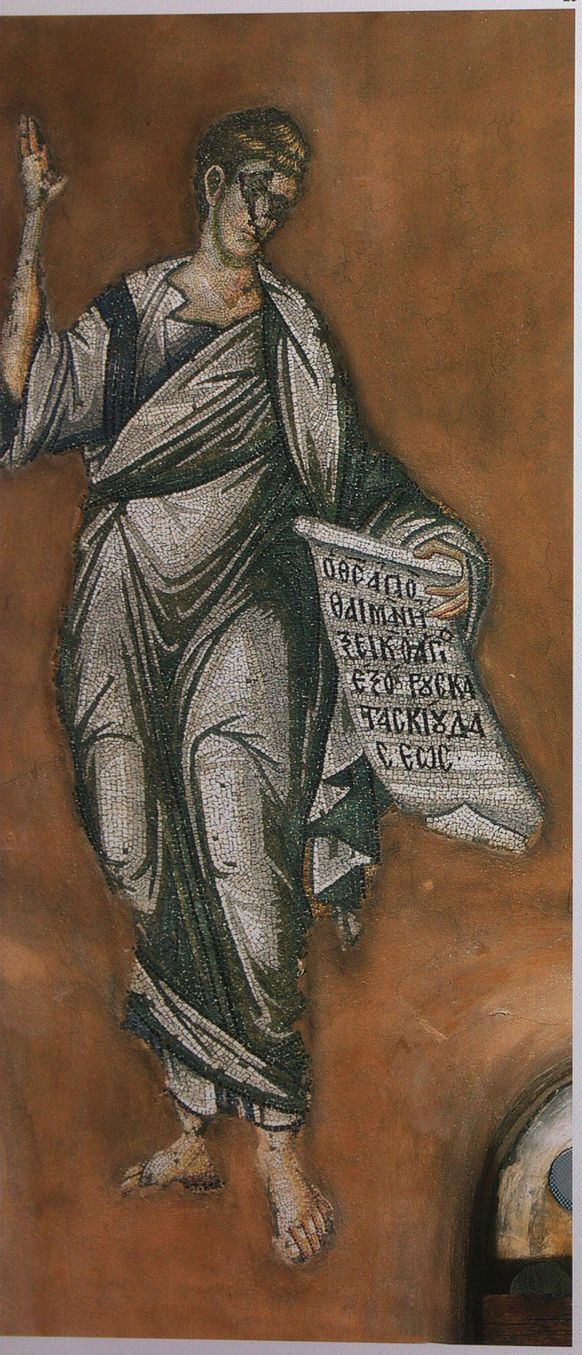
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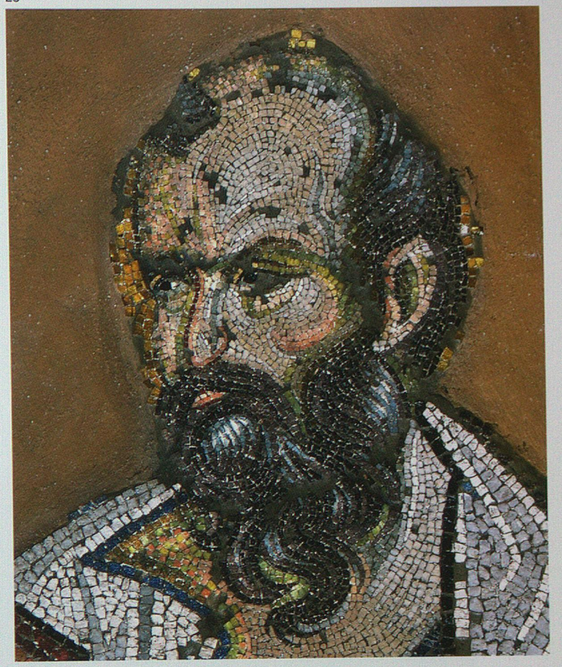
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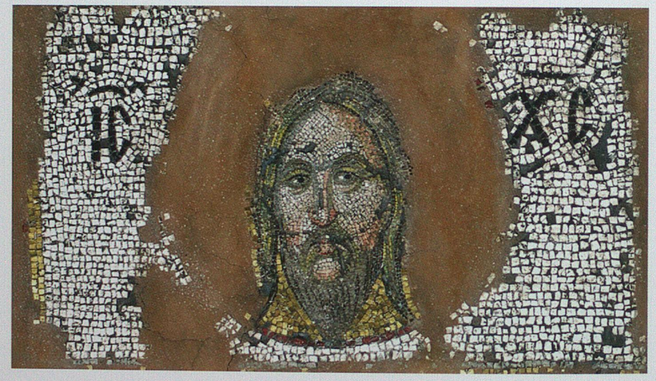


THE HOLY MANDYLION AND THE EVANGELISTS

The subject of the Holy Mandylion as an *acheiropoietos* image of Christ was particularly esteemed in Byzantium and in domed churches is represented in the east part of the base of the dome.[34] In the Holy Apostles church the painter selected the earlier, simple type of the plain rectangular frame of white tesserae, without ornaments. The gold tesserae of the ground and the halo have been removed, but the face of Christ remains almost intact. The elongated ascetic visage with the clear serene gaze, successfully renders the character of the relic which is proof of the Christ's Incarnation.

The Evangelists, whose work underpinned and disseminated Christianity, are in the usual positions on the pendentives. All four are depicted seated in front of magnificent buildings, which impart depth and glory to their extravagant voluminous figures. In front

33



of each one is a low table with writing implements and a footstool on which their feet rest. They wear a chiton and a himation. Their dress, pose and facial expression recall statues of seated ancient philosophers. The influence of Hellenistic art is overt.[35]

Depicted on the east side are Matthew (northeast pendentive) and John (southeast pendentive), both turned eastwards and towards the Holy Mandylion. Matthew, with short grey hair and long beard, holds in his hands an unrolled scroll with text, but his gaze is not directed at this; he is lost in his own thoughts. John holds a codex in the left hand and brings the right hand up to his face in a gesture of reflection and concentration. His face is destroyed. Behind him is the rocky cave of Patmos, in which he wrote the Revelation.

33. The Holy Mandylion, proof of the Incarnation of Christ, was a particularly popular subject depicted in diverse form in the domes of churches, usually on the east part of the base of the dome.

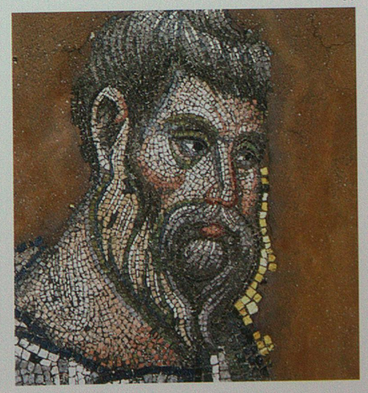
34. Illustration of the northeast and northwest pendentives with the figures of the Evangelists Luke and Matthew. Despite the damage, the magnificence of the buildings framing the evangelists can be discerned.

35. Evangelist Matthew from the northeast pendentive (detail of fig. 34)

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In the cave mouth is a basket with rolled scrolls, alluding to his work as an author.

Represented on the west side are Mark and Luke. Mark, on the southwest pendentive, sits between two edifices connected behind him by a lower wall. He wears a blue chiton with clavus and a himation of almost the same hue. In his left hand he holds an open codex on his lap. In the right hand, which is outstretched towards the writing table on his right, he holds a stylus, which he dips into an inkwell. There are two fenesters in the table; visible in one is an inkwell and in the other the end of a scroll, while to the right of the table is a basket of scrolls. An interesting detail that is common in this period is the raising of his left foot, which does not step on the footstool.

36. Evangelist Matthew is depicted holding in his hands the open scroll inscribed with the opening words of his Gospel. Beside him is the table with the writing implements (northeast pendentive).

37. Evangelist Mark is depicted holding the codex on his thighs and dipping his stylus into the inkwell on the writing desk beside him. His head is destroyed. The scrolls in the basket allude to his work as an author (southwest pendentive).

38. Evangelist Luke is depicted as the familiar emaciated figure in characteristic pose, sharpening his stylus (northwest pendentive).

39. Evangelist John holds in his left hand a codex and raises his right to his face in a gesture of contemplation. Depicted on the right is the rocky cave of Patmos, in which he wrote the Revelation. The bunch of scrolls in the basket alludes to his work as an author (southeast pendentive).

Luke, in the northwest pendentive, is better preserved despite the damage. He too sits between two buildings, considerably destroyed, and on his left is a writing table, half-destroyed. A scroll protrudes from one fenester. Luke, a plethoric figure with a lavishly draped himation, extends his hands to the fore. He appears to be holding a codex or scroll, as if reading or writing in it or, most probably, sharpening his stylus. However, his gaze is directed far away and his bony face with very long neck renders the intensity of his concentration. Peculiar is the position of the feet, in T-shape.

With these extravagant figures, their easy movement, corporeality and facial expression, and with the imposing and suggestive edicules behind them, the painter has used to aesthetic advantage the difficult space of the pendentives, endowing the ensemble of the dome with a rare result.

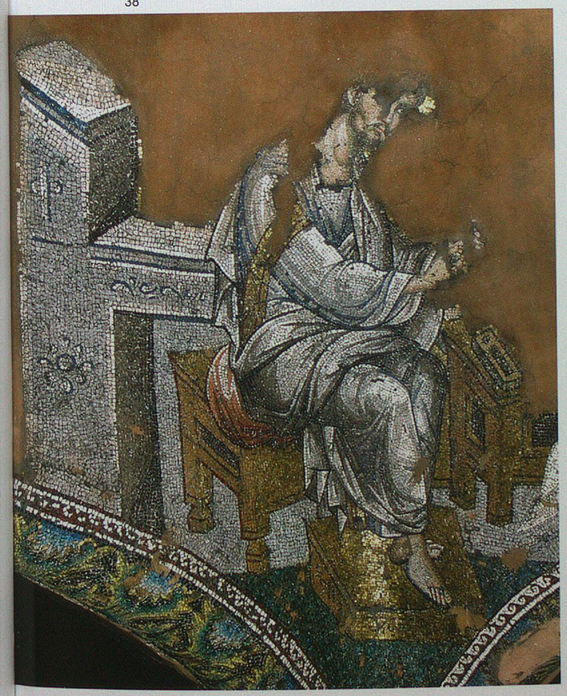
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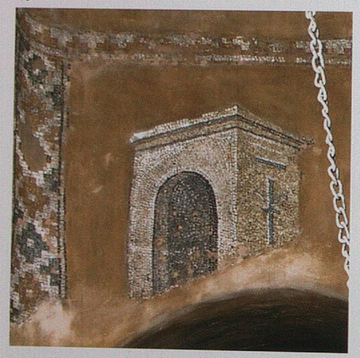
40. The representation of the Annunciation. Only part of the building and traces of the angel's diadem are preserved.

41. The figure of the Virgin from the representation of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (detail).

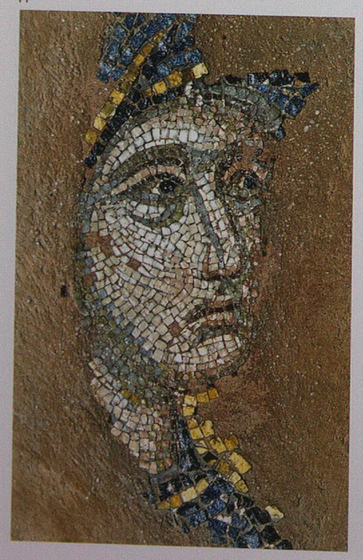
42. The representation of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. The only figure in the surviving part is the Virgin. The rest of the subject with the figure of Symeon, will have been depicted in the corresponding position north.

43. The position of the representation of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Hypapante) in the lower part of the west side of the south vault.

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41



CYCLE OF TWELVE FEASTS (DODECAORTON)

The mosaic decoration continues with scenes from the Cycle of Twelve Feasts (Dodecaorton) on the front of the east wall, in the three vaults of the cross and on the west wall. Nothing has survived in the east vault. Only nine scenes exist from the Dodecaorton, and these largely destroyed.

THE ANNUNCIATION

The artist illustrated this scene in two parts, one above the arch linking the northeast column to the north wall of the naos and the other above the arch linking the southeast column to the south wall, where the representation has been destroyed completely.[36] The scant traces preserved in the north part indicate that the Annunciation was depicted. Discernible are part of a building in front of which was the Archangel Gabriel. The top of his head survives, with the ribbon as a kind of diadem in his hair. Nothing survives of the Virgin Mary, who was depicted in the south part.

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

The representation of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Hypapante) was also divided into two parts, above the arch linking the northwest column to the north wall and that linking the southwest

42



43



column to the south wall.[37] It too is almost totally destroyed. Preserved are traces in the south part. At the left edge of the composition stands a large building in the form of a single-aisle basilica with a large archway on the façade. In front of the building stands the Theotokos. All that survives are her head and legs from the knee down. She is turned to the right, towards the north part, where Symeon will certainly have been depicted. The rendering of her face bespeaks the high quality of the lost work. It is not possible to say from the surviving elements whether the Virgin was accompanied by Joseph, as is usual, and whether Symeon had beside him the Prophetess Anna, nor whether the infant Christ was in Symeon's arms, as is the norm in the fourteenth century, or in his mother's arms, in accordance with earlier models.[38]

The rest of the Dodecaorton scenes were placed in pairs on the intrados of the vaults and the Dormition of the Virgin was on the west wall. The representations begin from the southeast arch with the Nativity and follow the chronological sequence of the events.

44. Illustration of the south arch with the badly damaged representations of the Nativity and the Baptism.

44



THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

The painter seems to have studied carefully and to have used to advantage the relatively small space of the southeast vault, in which the Nativity and the Baptism are depicted.

The representation of the Nativity in the east part of the vault is badly destroyed. Nevertheless, the artist's endeavour to create three planes in a mountainous landscape, in order to include all the episodes, is evident. Central figure of the composition is the Virgin Mary recumbent on a pallet, only the head of whom survives in the left part. Well preserved are the cave and the swaddled babe in a marble crib-sarcophagus, symbol of Christ's death and sacrifice. Discernible behind the crib are the heads of two animals (ox and ass), which are usually in this position.

On the upper level and behind the rocky landscape, the angels bring the glad tidings of the Nativity. Traces of them exist only on the left side; the rest is destroyed.

On the middle plane, right, and at about the same height as the recumbent Virgin and the child, two shepherd boys stand close together, side by side, on a flat rock. They uplift their heads towards the angel or angels, now lost. From their facial expressions they are obviously troubled. One, dressed in an animal skin and turned towards the viewer, rests his left hand on a staff and raises his right in a gesture of speech and surprise. The other, wearing a short tunic and a conical cap of leaves, also rests his left hand on a stave and raises his right in front of his chest. His bewilderment and fear is obvious from the position of

the legs, set apart, the inclination of his body towards the other shepherd and his worried gaze. In Holy Apostles this group of two figures is rendered with a freedom comparable to that known from Hellenistic representations of pastoral scenes and bears witness to the painter's education.[39]

On the left side, at the same level, the artist has exploited the mountainous landscape to place the three Magi, galloping on horseback in quest of Christ. They are attired in the established costume of their iconography, namely a short tunic, a cloak and leggings. Although executed in the manner of miniatures, the painter has successfully conveyed the lively movement of the horses as they advance upwards, the facial expressions and body attitudes of the Magi. The composition recalls comparable representations in the Chora monastery at Constantinople[40] and in the Peribleptos at Mystras.[41]

In the lower zone, two different subjects are juxtaposed. On the

45. The representation of the Nativity in the east part of the south vault is a masterly composition on three levels. Despite the damage, part of the angels, the Virgin with the holy infant in the cradle, the bathing of the infant, the shepherds receiving the glad tidings, Joseph deeply troubled and the Magi journeying in search of Christ are preserved.

45



46. The bathing of the infant, one of the loveliest scenes in Byzantine art, is based on the apocryphal gospels. Depicted in the episode are the midwife with the infant Christ in her arms, testing the temperature of the water, and the young maidservant Salome. Joseph, deeply troubled by the event, is rendered in masterly manner with the pose of his body and his facial expression conveying his mood. Next to Joseph is a shepherd with sheep.

left, the charming episode of the infant's bath, and on the right, Joseph deep in thought. The detail of the bath, which is based on the apocryphal gospels,[42] gives not only a human touch but also a happy note to the scene, despite the serious mien of the figures. In this lovely scene, the midwife is depicted sitting and holding the gold-nimbed naked infant in her arms. With her left hand she tests the temperature of the water in the gold basin before her. She is a corpulent and sobre figure with multi-coloured head covering and lavishly draped garment girdled at the waist. On the other side of the basin stands the young maidservant Salome, in sleeved tunic, bending over slightly and pouring water into the stoup from a gold pitcher.

On the right side, a short distance from Salome, Joseph sits with his back turned on the scene of the bath, as if oblivious to the event. His arms are enveloped in his himation and only his left hand protrudes, touching the corresponding cheek, while the elbow rests on the left knee. His bearded face is only partially preserved, yet the concern is evident in his eyes. Beside the deeply contemplative Joseph stands a shepherd in a sheepskin, bending slightly towards him and holding a musical instrument

46



(pipe) in his right hand. Near him are three sheep, which too, like the shepherd, look at Joseph. There is an analogous rendering of the subject, although not in exactly the same form, in the twelfth-century miniature in the codex Suppl. gr. 27 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris,[43] where there are two shepherds, not three. The representation at Arilje (1297-1299) is similar, but the figures are on the left.[44] It is clear that the painter had certain models in mind but did not copy them slavishly. Given the space available to him and the manner he wished to impart to the synthesis, he imparted a personal character to the work.

47. The three Magi on horseback progress in their quest for Christ. Although the rendering is almost miniaturist, the painter has successfully captured the intense movement of the Magi and their steeds.

48. Two shepherds. The painter renders with remarkable realism their surprise and bewilderment.

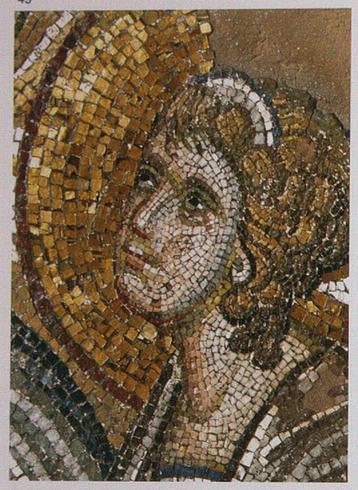
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THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

The upper and lower parts of the representation are destroyed. All that survives of the landscape are the River Jordan and its banks. In the river stands Christ, naked, a characteristic attributed to the art of Constantinople. His arms hang loosely down the sides of his body. The fingers of his left hand, which is above the personification of the Jordan, are calm and open, as if in a gesture of protection with the palm facing downwards. The thumb and the last two fingers of the right hand are joined, while the other two fingers point reprovingly and somewhat menacingly towards the figure in the water in the left part of the representation. This is a naked child riding upon a sea monster. In his right hand he holds something like a rein, to keep the monster in check, and he raises his left above his head, poised to strike with the whip he holds. He looks intently and afeard towards Christ. Some designate this figure as a personification of the sea and others as a cupid.[45] It seems,

50



however, that it is associated with the blessing of the waters by Christ and denotes the evils that are tamed by the advent of the Saviour.[46]

The figure of John the Baptist stands on the left bank. The head, the upper torso and the right hand with which he baptizes Christ are missing. The pose of the legs, visible under his garments (sheepskin and himation), and the inclination of his body convey his impetuous movement towards Christ. Behind and below John's legs is a tree, close to the root of which is the axe, in accordance with the passages in the gospels of Matthew (3:10) and Luke (3:9), as an exhortation for men's repentance.

On the right bank, two angels move with their face and torso turned towards Jesus, and their hands covered by white cloths *(lentia)* to receive him. Just above them, the traces of one or two other angels are discernible.

The models of this beautiful representation are to be sought in the art of Constantinople. Even so, the cupid, which has been interpreted also as personification of the sea, despite the fact that according to a long tradition from Antiquity the sea is depicted as a female figure, does not belong to the iconography of the Capital. For this reason, its depiction has been regarded as a misunderstanding. However, the subject exists in works in the region of Macedonia. The representation has been correlated with its counterpart in the Pammakaristos at Constantinople.[47] In the view of those who have studied the Constantinopolitan monument, for the scene of the Baptism this followed models from the Protaton[48] and Arilje.[49] These pieces of evidence indicate that the painter received diverse influences but that basically he made his own choices.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

In the west vault are the representations of the Transfiguration (south part) and the Entry into Jerusalem (north part). The two subjects are separated by an impressive circular ornament at the apex of the vault. Analogous ornaments must have existed in the other vaults but have not survived.

The composition of the Transfiguration is divided into two planes.[50] Depicted on the upper level is the divine presence and on the lower the human. On the upper level, atop three crags of almost the same height stand three figures. On the central peak is Christ within an elliptical rayed mandorla, and on either side of him and turned towards him are the prophets who appeared at the Transfiguration, Elijah left and Moses holding the tablets of the Law right.

49. Angel (detail of fig. 50).

50. The Baptism. Christ, naked in the River Jordan, is baptized by John the Baptist. Angels with *lentia* (pieces of cloth) prepare to receive him in the river, which Christ sanctifies with his baptism. Depicted are the personification of the Jordan and a nude child who reacts uneasily to the event (west part of the south vault).

51. The mosaics in the west vault, which depict the Transfiguration and the Entry into Jerusalem. Between the two representations is a circular ornament of exquisite art.

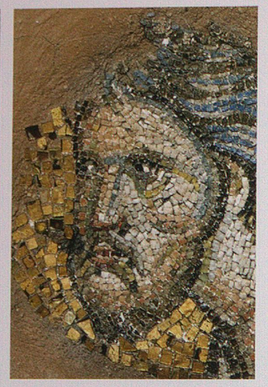
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Three other rocks on the lower level depict Mount Tabor, on which the event took place. Present were three apostles. In most monuments these are represented in the sequence Peter, John, James, in accordance with the Gospel of Luke. In Holy Apostles the series is Peter, James, John, that is it follows the text of Matthew (17:1) and Mark (9:2), possibly because the passage from Matthew was read during the Liturgy on the feast day.[51] It is possible, however, that the painter opted for this sequence for aesthetic reasons, dictated by the available space and the target he had set.

The three apostles on the lower level are projected in front of rocks. On the left is Peter, kneeling. Although his torso is turned leftwards, away from Christ, his head is turned awestruck towards the effulgent mandorla. Peter's discomposure is apparent in his facial expression and body movement. In the middle is James, who has fallen on the ground, with his head to the left and a markedly hunched back as he raises his left hand to the chin in a gesture of wonderment and fear. On the right is John, who falls supine, his head rolling downwards. His right arm follows the direction of his body, but the left is lifted to the face as if he wants to shield his eyes. By utilizing to good effect the position of the rocks, the painter has achieved a representation full of motion and agitation, successfully conveying the apostles' feelings of trouble and fear as they beheld the blinding light and heard the roaring thunder.

Scholars to date have discussed in particular the way in which Christ is depicted within the elliptical rayed mandorla. Formed inside this are a square and four lozenges in X-shaped arrangement. These emit sheaves of light rays which beam towards the apostles.

These shapes have been associated with the theories of the Hesychasts, because in the writings of Gregory Palamas they are interpreted as symbolic representations of the two other figures of the Holy Trinity, which are present but invisible during the Transfiguration.[52] However, it cannot be clarified securely whether this means that the Hesychastic movement influenced the painter or the founder, or whether the monastery was associated with Hesychastic circles.

52. Prophet Elijah (detail of fig. 55).

53. Moses (detail of fig. 55).

54. The circular ornament (detail of fig. 51).

55. The Transfiguration. The painter depicts the scene on two levels: above, the divine presence (Christ in mandorla with Prophet Elijah and Moses holding the tablets of the Law); below, the earthly realm with the Apostles Peter, James and John.

55



THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

For this subject the painter followed tenth-century models which were continued also in Palaiologan representations, yet he created a personally inspired composition The illustration includes the two groups established in Byzantine iconography, Christ's passage towards Jerusalem and the crowd waiting to welcome him.

The mountainous landscape in which the figures move is divided into two parts.[53] On the left, in front of the Mount of Olives, at the far edge of which can be seen houses in the town of Bethany (Matthew 21:1, Mark 11:1, Luke 19:29), Christ's passage, in the company of his Disciples, towards Jerusalem is depicted. The Lord sits sideways on a white donkey and turns his body backwards towards his Disciples and the throng behind them. His gaze, however, is fixed on the group to the right, so linking the two different moments in time, of the procession and of the welcome. In his left hand is a rolled scroll, while with his right he blesses. Realistic is the rendering of the bent legs of the donkey, as it trots down the steep path.

56. The Entry into Jerusalem. The composition is divided by a hillock into two separate episodes; that of Christ's progress towards Jerusalem, and that of the multitude of Jews who come forth to meet him, while children strew the road with pieces of cloth.

56



The second group is separated from the first by a low knoll. In the distance is the city of Jerusalem and in front of this the multitude of Jews who come forth to welcome Christ. Behind the city walls are buildings, among them a circular temple, indicating the temple of Solomon or the church of the Holy Sepulchre.[54] The host of Jews moves to the left, clearly expectant and agitated. In front of them, and against the backdrop of the knoll, three children dressed in short sleeveless tunics hold palm fronds and spread out cloths for Christ to walk on. A charming detail that connects the two compositions is the tall trees, at the top of which are children lopping off branches, a genre scene characteristic mainly of Palaiologan times, which is a joyful image with a sense of the everyday.

57



57. The Entry into Jerusalem (detail of fig. 56).

58. The representations of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection (Anastasis) in the north vault.

58



THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

Depicted on the intrados of the north vault are the Crucifixion (west part) and the Resurrection or Anastasis (east part). The representation of the Crucifixion has suffered extensive damage, but this has not obscured its iconographic and stylistic rendering. The composition is few-figured and majestic.[55] In the middle is Christ on the Cross. The upper part of his body and the legs from the calves and below are missing. Nonetheless, the white loincloth tied in front in a knot survives. The lifeless body apparently lacks the strong curvature frequently encountered in Macedonian monuments.[56] The painter preferred the earlier iconographic type, as seen at Daphni.[57] Preserved on the left are small parts of the lower part of the chiton of two female figures, certainly the Theotokos and one of the Myrrh-bearing Women. The faces are lost and it is not possible to speculate on the Virgin's pose, that is whether her hand was brought up to the chin or whether she was swooning, about to faint. However, from the whole air of the representation it is surmised that the more restrained manner of expressing her sentiments was preferred.

On the right, close to the Cross, stands John, Christ's beloved disciple. His body is covered by the himation, under which his knees bent by sorrow can be seen. His left arm hangs limply down the body

59. Christ of the representation of the Crucifixion.

60. The surviving part of the Crucifixion, with John deep in sorrow and the centurion.

61. Adam (detail of fig. 63).

62. Figure of a Righteous man (detail of fig. 63).

63. The representation of the Resurrection (east part of north vault). The particular inclination of Christ's neck, in his movement to draw forth Adam from the sarcophagus, and the inclination of the halo give the composition a rather unusual form.

and the right, brought up to the face, props up the bowed head, only half of which now exists. Behind this comely figure, rendered with great feeling, stands the centurion with metal breastplate and cloak, uplifting his head and right hand towards the Cross.

In opting to depict only the principal persons in the scene, the painter has succeeded in expressing the poignant pain and sorrow without excessive movements and gestures, admirably conveying an atmosphere of reflection and silence in the presence of the momentous event.

59



60



THE RESURRECTION (THE DESCENT INTO HELL)

The cycle of the Twelve Feasts with Christ as protagonist concludes at the east end of the north vault, with the representation of the Descent into Hell.[58] Principal figure in the composition is, of course, Christ, depicted within an elliptical mandorla. He rushes to the right with such vigour that his himation billows behind him. The impetuous movement is transferred also to the elliptical mandorla, which too slopes to the right. In his left hand Christ holds the cross of the Resurrection and with his right he draws up Adam, holding him by the right hand. Under his feet opens the dark cavern of Hell, scattered in which are the broken locks of the gates and keys. Because of the damage to the representation, it is not possible to discern whether Adam or Satan was depicted in the cave, although it is very possible that neither was shown.

The intensity of Christ's movement is most obvious in the rendering of the particularly long, stretched neck, which is observed for the first time in the Holy Apostles church and is repeated a little later in some figures in the Chora monastery,[59] the Peribleptos at Mystras (1360-1370)[60] and the Theoskepastos in Trebizond (1376).[61] This detail has been attributed to Constantinopolitan influence, but the works referred to are later than the mosaics in Holy Apostles. The slant of the mandorla has been identified in a miniature in the fourteenth-century codex 543, in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which too post-dates the mosaic.[62]

Depicted at a lower level than Christ is the aged figure of Adam, with long wavy hair and beard. He kneels inside a sarcophagus and raises his left hand in supplication towards the Lord. According to the texts, Adam venerates the Saviour, who raises the Protoplast to take him with him. The depiction of the sarcophagus is considered an archaism, because it exists already from the tenth-eleventh century at Daphni and is believed to be of Constantinopolitan provenance.[63] There is a similar sarcophagus on the left side.

Behind Adam stands Eve, her hands like his raised in a gesture of supplication. Behind her is the youthful figure of Abel, beside whom stands one other figure of a Righteous man, with hands raised in prayer. Behind them are other figures, only the faces of which are visible.

In the left part of the representation, behind Christ, stand St John the Baptist and, below, the aged figure of the prophet-king David, with crown on his head and hands raised towards Christ. David's body is turned towards the Saviour, but his face is turned

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62





towards the figure next to him, with the hands outstretched to the fore and covered by the himation. The face of the figure is destroyed but it must be Solomon, because these two prophet-kings are usually shown together. Preserved above him is the head of one other prophet-king and of one other badly destroyed figure. The whole composition appears to have been framed by rocks, now lost.

The representation vividly recalls its counterpart in the codex Iviron 5 on Mount Athos, which is dated to the thirteenth-fourteenth century,[64] although it is not exactly identical. The depiction of the sarcophagus was attributed to Constantinople, although it should be noted that in the church of Christ at Veroia, work of the excellent artist Kalliergis (1315), both Adam and Eve are depicted genuflecting

64



on the rim of a sarcophagus.[65] It seems that in order to achieve an original composition with movement and introspection, the artist chose the iconographic elements that he wanted, without imitating any one absolutely.

THE DORMITION OF THE VIRGIN

The last representation of the Dodecaorton is in its usual position on the west wall of the naos, above the entrance leading from the narthex to the naos.[66] The entire left part is destroyed; only a small part of a building exists. Missing are the Virgin's bier and the figure of Christ with her soul, behind it. The Apostles, who are normally represented in two groups, near the head and the feet of the Theotokos, were apparently all congregated on the right in the representation in Holy Apostles. They are led by Peter, who bows slightly towards the bier. In his closed right hand he apparently held the customary censer. On account of the position of Peter, who is always shown next to the Virgin's head, it should be assumed that her head was depicted to the right.[67] Behind Peter are two other, full-bodied Apostles. The first has his hands in front on the chest and profound sorrow in his eyes. The second figure, with long white wavy hair and beard, can be identified as Andrew, on the basis of its iconographic elements. He brings his right hand up to the chest, while the left arm, with clenched fist, hangs downwards. His facial expression and flexed knees convey his grief. One other Apostle behind Peter, of whom only the head turned left can be seen, has the hand raised with open palm at the height of the face. Emotion and agitation are apparent in his face and palm. From his portrait features he can perhaps be identified as Paul, who is usually shown at the Virgin's feet. The rest of the Apostles cannot be identified confidently, with the exception perhaps of the beardless one, who may be Philip or Thomas, who are usually depicted young.

Behind the Apostles are two hierarchs, represented to the waist, identified as Dionysios the Areopagite (left) and James (right), who are usually depicted at the representation of the Dormition of the Virgin.[68]

It is not possible to hypothesize which figures existed on the left side, in front of the surviving part of a building. Perhaps here were the angels, widows, maidens and the throng, as well as some figures of women peeping out of the windows. Perhaps these figures were the reason why the Apostles are congregated in a dense group and on various levels on one side.

65



64. A prophet-king and St John the Baptist (detail of fig. 63).

65. Apostles from the Dormition of the Virgin (detail of fig. 66).

66

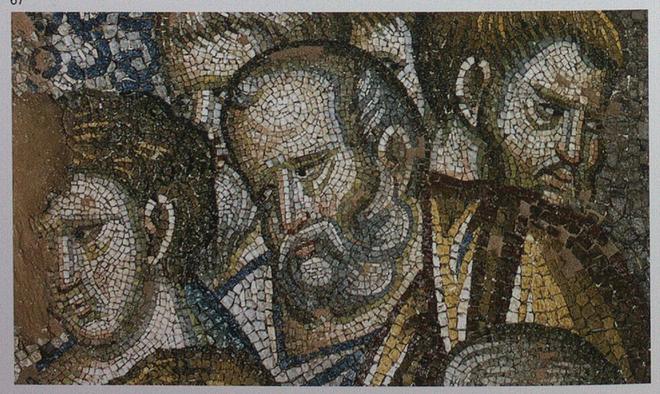


Two figures which are usually found on the left and the right of the representation are linked with the subject of the Dormition of the Virgin. These are John of Damascus and Cosmas of Maiouma, whose canons are chanted on the feast day of the Dormition of the Virgin. Indeed, it is believed that their depiction is due to the particular cult of the Virgin during the Palaiologan period. Specifically, on the basis of an edict of Andronikos II in 1297, it was established that the Dormition would be celebrated throughout the month of August and not only on the eve and day of the feast, as of old. The fast was extended for two weeks before and two weeks after the feast, beginning on 1 August. It was ordained that during this interval feasts would be held with psalmodies of hymns and other celebratory events. However, the depiction of the hymnographers in the Dormition is known to have existed earlier.[69]

Of the two hymnographers represented in the Holy Apostles church, only one survives, Cosmas of Maiouma on the south side of the west vault, below the Transfiguration. John of Damascus, who was depicted on the north side, has not survived.

Cosmas is identified on the basis of the text in his scroll, on which is inscribed his 1st Ode.[70] He wears the habit of a high-ranking monk and a mantle fastened with a fibula on the chest. His body is turned towards the representation of the Dormition. In his left hand he holds a scroll unrolled upwards, on which he writes with his right. His head is covered by a cowl, as in the Protaton[71] and at Staro Nagoričino.[72] In monuments such as these he is depicted as an aged figure with white hair, whereas in Holy Apostles the hymnographer has grey hair and beard, as in the wall-paintings in the Christ church at Veroia[73] and the parekklesion of St Euthymios

67



in St Demetrios, Thessaloniki,[74] and earlier in the Koumbelidiki church of Kastoria.[75] His figure is reminiscent of the prophet Ezekiel in the dome of the church, which figure Kalliergis is believed to have copied in the Christ church in Veroia, in 1315.[76] This representation was cited in support of the view that the decoration on the west wall of Holy Apostles had been completed prior to 1315.

FIGURES OF SAINTS

The decoration of the church included a number of standing saints, whose names are removed along with the gold tesserae of the ground of the mosaics. Two groups of five martyrs have been identified on the basis of iconographic and portrait features.[77]

One group of five martyrs whose feasts are celebrated on 13 December is in the south part of the west side. These are saints Eustratios, Orestes, Mardarios, Eugenios and a now headless figure which should be identified as Auxentios.

The second group of five martyrs is depicted in the north part of the west side. These are saints Akindynos, Pegasios, Aphthonios, Elpidophoros and Anembodistos, whose feasts are celebrated on 2 November. The only figures which have been identified on the basis of physiognomic traits are saints Anembodistos and Aphthonios, at the north end of the west side.

In addition to the two groups of five martyrs there are three more unidentified saints, two at the edges of the arch linking the southwest part with the west wall, and one at the west edge of the arch linking the west wall with the northwest column; one other saint must have been depicted in correspondence with this.

In the course of conservation works on the mosaics, remains of five circles with dentate frame and busts of saints, of which only Markianos and Martyrios have been identified, were uncovered on the hemispherical ceiling of the southwest corner of the naos. Identical circles with saints will have existed on the corresponding hemispherical ceiling of the northwest corner, but these have not survived.

The concentration of so many saints in the west part of the naos is an indication that the iconographic tradition of Constantinople is followed, since this phenomenon is observed in the monastery at Daphni and in the Chora monastery in the Byzantine capital. However, in these Constantinopolitan monuments the saints are located in the narthex, probably due to strictures of space.[78]

68



69



66. The Dormition of the Virgin on the west wall of the naos. The composition is badly destroyed. Distinctive is the gathering of the Apostles on one side, whereas usually they are grouped near the head and the feet of the Virgin.

67. Apostles from the Dormition of the Virgin (detail of fig. 66).

68. Two saints. The one on the right is possibly St Eugenios.

69. St Eustratios.

70



71



70. St Orestes (?).

71. St Markianos.

72. St Martyrios.

72



DECORATIVE MOTIFS

The painter attached particular importance to the decorative motifs, vegetal or geometric, which surround the compositions, rightly regarding them as a significant factor in the aesthetic impact of his work.

The vegetal ornaments are based mainly on the Early Christian acanthus motif. In addition to this, fleur de lis motifs with two extra small leaves at their tip are used in the vertical bands. On the window arches and the narrow surfaces at the base of the dome, monochrome schematic vegetal ornaments of linear form were basically used.

Geometric motifs (spiral-meander) were used to frame the vegetal decoration, in particular the double row of meander pattern forming multiple crosses. Where there is insufficient space, a simpler form of this ornament was used.

The superb large rosette motif, placed at the apex of the west vault as a separator between the two representations on the arch, has been mentioned already. Similar rosettes perhaps existed in the middle of other arches, as observed also in the Chora monastery.[79] This is a finely-worked ornament including assorted colours and shapes in exquisite harmony.

Despite the fact that all the decorative motifs resemble those in the Chora monastery, it should be noted that artistically the ornaments in the Holy Apostles are superior, displaying greater vitality and skill.[80]

73. Ornament (detail).

73



ICONOGRAPHIC SINGULARITIES

Scholars who have studied the mosaics in the Holy Apostles church have already stressed the numerous iconographic singularities of this work, which have been referred to above in the presentation of the individual subjects. Among the most important are the rendering of the hand of Christ Pantocrator in the dome; the shepherds and the group of Joseph and shepherd in the Nativity; the figure of a child upon a sea monster and the nudity of Christ in the Baptism; the rays of light inside the mandorla in the Transfiguration, which have been linked with Hesychasm; the arrangement of the groups of figures in the Entry into Jerusalem; the impulsive movement of Christ within the slanting elliptical mandorla, the depiction of the sarcophagi in the Resurrection; the gathering of the Apostles on the right side of the representation of the Dormition of the Virgin.

Some of these singularities have been attributed to Constantinopolitan influence, others to the region of Macedonia, and others to earlier models. This ascertainment points to both the artist's knowledge and his ability to produce a work with his own personal stamp. He is not a slavish copier of models but a true creator. The founder-donor may well have played a role too in the choice of subjects and their treatment. However, there is no doubt that the composition of each representation and its execution are the work of the artist and the result of his education and talent.

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76



STYLISTIC ANALYSIS – DATING

According to those who have studied the mosaics in Holy Apostles, these are the work of two or three artists. The first scholar to study the work, A. Xyngopoulos, noted a lack of uniformity in the craftsmanship and expressed the view that this project was undertaken by two mosaicists.[81] One he accredited with the mosaics in the dome, the pendentives and the arms of the cross (Pantocrator, Prophets, Evangelists, Holy Mandylion, Nativity, Baptism, Transfiguration, Entry into Jerusalem, Crucifixion, Resurrection and saints Markianos and Martyrios), and the other with the mosaics in the lower zone of the west part of the naos (Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Dormition of the Virgin, St Cosmas of Maiouma and the martyrs), considering that their technical execution and palette are different.

According to A. Xyngopoulos, the first mosaicist used for the faces and the flesh tiny tesserae with subtle shades of the same colour. These he synthesized in a masterly manner, so as to give from afar the impression of a single chromatic tone, delicately modulated from dark to light. The colour on the flesh is mostly brown and pink, in a wide range of hues. For the garments and the buildings the artist used several shades of grey, tending towards green, rose, light blue and yellow. His work displays pronounced influence from wall-painting, to which are owed the smooth transitions from the dark to light shades, with which the plasticity of the volumes is achieved. It is this subtlety of execution which creates the painterly impression. After all, in this period artists, due to the high cost, were dealing more with fresco and the mosaic icons.

The second craftsman, in A. Xyngopoulos's view, uses complementary colours on the face, the flesh, the hair and the beards. He avoids delicate transitional tones and his light and dark planes are

schematic, taking the form of streaks/patches. His handling of purely impressionistic means is adroit and his rendering of reality bold. To create the impression of grey in the hair and the beards, when viewed from afar, he employs blue, yellow, green lines and shades of white. He uses larger tesserae than the first craftsman, and his work is consequently less refined. That is why A. Xyngopoulos reaches the conclusion that the second craftsman is a true mosaicist. These differences in the treatment of the flesh, the hair and the beards, which exist in the work of the two craftsmen, are not observed on the garments, which display the same harshness, the same abrupt light and shade, and strident contrasts. Nonetheless, the painter achieves very harmonious results by using complementary colours on the parts in shadow.

On the basis of these observations, A. Xyngopoulos concluded that both artists executed only the faces and flesh, whereas the garments and the landscapes were completed by their assistants to the drawings they gave them. This practice of division of labour is well known.[82] Nevertheless, A. Xyngopoulos emphasizes that the work overall was conceived and designed by one painter.

His view is espoused by Christine Stephan in her study of the painting in Holy Apostles.[83] She differs, however, in the allocation of the work by the two painters. Moreover, she believes that perhaps a third artist executed the saints in the corner bays. One of the two artists is more progressive and uses traits of the second Palaiologan style, while the other is more conservative and features elements of the so-called volume style of the late thirteenth century.[84] Finally, she expresses the view that both artists are of Constantinopolitan provenance and that in all probability they undertook, not long afterwards, the painting in the Chora monastery.[85]

Detecting the number of artists who worked on the mosaics and identifying the work of each remain in the realm of hypothesis, since historical evidence is lacking. After all, A. Xyngopoulos already attributed the garments to assistants in the workshop, because of the differences apparent in their execution in comparison with the faces and the flesh. Nonetheless, both scholars agree that the work was designed by one painter, as there is certainly a single concept in the composition of the mosaics. However, the differentiation in the use of colours on certain figures is not necessarily evidence of different painters; it may be due to the position of the representation and the kind of lighting in the space, a factor which painters take into account. The tiny tesserae on the faces and flesh are not due to

77



74-76. Ornaments (details).

77. Detail from the representation of the Resurrection (Anastasis) (fig. 63).

different artists, because they are used on all the figures and are imposed by the single design.

The progressive or conservative trends ascertained in the mosaics could be attributed to different painters, but perhaps they are due also to the inquiries and deliberations of one painter in whom old and new currents coexist.

To what has been said so far, one other point, which had not been noticed previously, should be added. This concerns the rendering of the eyes, par excellence expressive medium of the artist. The eyes have very dark pupils with a little stark white. The striking pupils, which slant anxiously towards the corners of the eyes, sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, are the same in all the figures and seem to be distinctive of the personality of the chief artist and not of two or three painters. The nature of his participation in the project, other than its design, is an unanswerable question.

The painter's place of origin is considered to be Constantinople. The use of models from the capital is clear, nonetheless other elements have been attributed to the region of Macedonia. Thus, one wonders what was the contribution of Thessalonikan painters to this work, given that the city was enjoying an artistic heyday in this period, its influence radiating throughout the Balkans. Thessalonikan painters had been apprenticed or had worked in Constantinople[86] and, naturally, had received influences from there.

The project was realized in a happy moment, when incumbent of the patriarchal throne was Niphon (1310-1314), who hailed from Veroia, a town near to Thessaloniki, with which it had close relations. So, we may ask, might not Niphon have selected painters from Thessaloniki? The question remains open, for lack of historical documents. What is truly important is that the mosaics in the church of the Holy Apostles are a masterpiece, a work with a personal character and with pronounced renaissance tendencies, precursors of the Renaissance in the West, proof of the high standard of art in this period.

78. The bath of the infant Christ (detail of fig. 46).

79. Moses with the tablets of the Law (detail of fig. 55).





NOTES

1 For the church and its architecture see Papageorgiou 1901, 23-39, Diehl – Le Tourneau 1909, 39-60, Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 189-200, Ćurčić 1979, 72-73, 78 and 109, Vocotopoulos 1981, 251-273, Velenis 1981, 457-467, Vocotopoulos 1982, 97-110 and Velenis 1984, 218-222, 224-228, 233-237.
2 Velenis 1983, 23-36.
3 Orlandos 1940, 377-383.
4 Stephan 1986, 1.
5 Xyngopoulos 1932, 133-156. Xyngopoulos 1953a, ε′. For a recent conservation of the mosaics see Bakirtzis et al., 2008b, 57-63.
6 Texier 1839, vol. 3, 68. Spieser 1973, 168-169.
7 Duchesne – Bayet 1876, 59-60. Papageorgiou 1901, 28, 30. Xyngopoulos 1932, 152 and n. 1. Spieser 1973, 168-169, with earlier bibliography.
8 Papageorgiou 1901, 33-34. Diehl – Le Tourneau – Saladin 1918, 191 ff. and 199. Ćurčić 1979, 72 ff.
9 Velenis 1984, 218-222, 224-228, 233-237, with relevant bibliography. Dating by the method of dendrochronology gave the year of construction as 1329, see Kuniholm – Striker 1990, 9-11.
10 Spieser 1973, 169-170, no 20. Stephan 1986, 13.
11 Stephan 1986, 16-20.
12 Kissas 1977, 52-57.
13 Tafrali 1913, 180.
14 Xyngopoulos 1953c, 726-735.
15 Laskaris 1952, 315 ff.
16 See e.g. analogous cycle in St Nicholas the Orphan in Thessaloniki, Tsitouridou 1986, 141-159.
17 Underwood 1966, vol. 1, 27, 28.
18 Stephan 1986, 24. Dölger 1949, 35-53.
19 See n. 1.
20 See e.g. Chora monastery, Underwood 1966, and Pammakaristos, Belting – Mango – Mouriki 1978.
21 Bakirtzis - Mastora 2011a, 55-56.
22 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 3-5.
23 Nikonanos 1986, 33. Stephan 1986, 12.
24 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 34 ff. Stephan 1986, 40 ff.
25 Stephan 1986, 40.
26 Timken Matthews 1976, 90 ff.
27 Belting – Mango – Mouriki 1978, pl. I.
28 Underwood 1966, vol. 2, fig. 44.
29 Orlandos 1963, pl. I.
30 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 35.
31 Stephan 1986, 43-44.
32 Stephan 1986, 243-245.
33 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 40.
34 Grabar 1931, 26.
35 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 60-61.
36 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 9. Stephan 1986, 53.
37 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 14-16. Stephan 1986, 59.
38 Xyngopoulos 1929b, 338 ff.
39 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 12-13.
40 Underwood 1966, vol. 2, fig. 103.
41 Millet 1910, pl. 118, 2. Etzeoglou n.d., col. pl. 90.
42 Tischendorf 1876, 37 ff.
43 Omont 1929, pl. XCVIII, 4.
44 Petković 1930, pl. XXXII.
45 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 16-18. Stephan 1986, 59-62.
46 Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 2001, 298, with relevant bibliography.
47 Belting – Mango – Mouriki 1978, 95.
48 Tsigaridas 2003, 22-23, figs 6-10.
49 Belting – Mango – Mouriki 1978, 95 ff.
50 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 18-22. Stephan 1986, 62-65.
51 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 20-21.
52 Millet 1916, 230 ff.
53 Stephan 1986, 62.
54 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 23-24.
55 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 26-28. Stephan 1986, 68-71.
56 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 27.
57 Millet 1916, 407.
58 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 28-32. Stephan 1986, 71-74.
59 Underwood 1966, vol. 2, pls 254 and 266. Stephan 1986, 74.
60 Millet 1910, pl. 116, 3.
61 Millet – Rice 1936, pl. XXIV, 1.
62 Omont 1929, pl. CXIX, 1.
63 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 31.
64 Pelekanidis et al., 1975, fig. 36. Xyngopoulos 1953a, 33.
65 Pelekanidis 1973b, 66-69, pls 35-39, col. pl. 1A.
66 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 32-34. Stephan 1986, 74-77.
67 Wratislav-Mitrović – Okunev 1931, 137.
68 Wratislav-Mitrović – Okunev 1931, 138-139.
69 Stephan 1986, 80.
70 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 49-50.
71 Millet 1927, pl. 41, 2.
72 Todić 1993, fig. 31.
73 Pelekanidis 1973b, pl. 40.
74 Soteriou 1952, pl. 926.
75 Mavropoulou-Tsioumi 1973, pl. 35.
76 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 50.
77 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 50-53.
78 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 53-54.
79 Underwood 1966, vol. 2, pl. 91.
80 Underwood 1966, vol. 1, 331-333.
81 Xyngopoulos 1953a, 62-64.
82 For the collaboration of various artists in one workshop see *passim* the inscription in the Christ church, Veroia, where the painter himself, Kalliergis, makes reference to the participation of other persons in executing the wall-paintings. Pelekanidis 1973b, 8-9.
83 Stephan 1986, 242 ff.
84 Stephan 1986, 245, with relevant bibliography.
85 Stephan 1986, 260.
86 Mouriki 1978, 67. Gouma-Peterson 1991, 111-129.

(Editorial note). The photographs and drawings in this chapter are from the book in preparation by Ch. Bakirtzis, P. Mastora and N. Pitsalidis, 'The Mosaics in the Church of the Holy Apostles in Thessaloniki and their Conservation (2000-2004)'.

ABBREVIATIONS

ΑΔ	*Αρχαιολογικόν Δελτίον*
AE	*Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς*
ΑΕΜΘ	*Το Αρχαιολογικό Έργο στη Μακεδονία και Θράκη*
BCH	*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*
BSA	*The Annual of the British School at Athens*
BSl	*Byzantinoslavica*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CahArch	*Cahiers Archéologiques*
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CorsiRav	*Corsi di Cultura sull'Arte Ravennate e Bizantina*
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae (Bonn)
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
ΔΧΑΕ	*Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας*
ΕΕΒΣ	*Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών*
EO	*Échos d'Orient*
JbAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JEChrSt	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*
PG	Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, ed. J.-P. Migne
RA	*Revue Archéologique*
RbK	*Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*
TM	*Travaux et Mémoires*

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INTRODUCTION

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The rest of the illustrations with drawings (Rotunda, Holy Apostles) and photographs (Holy Apostles, phot. V. Tsonis) of the 9th Ephorate of Byzantine Antiquities, was completed by the editor of the volume for the specific publication.

ARTISTIC DESIGNER: RACHEL MISDRACHI-KAPON
ARTISTIC ADVISOR: MOSES KAPON
COPY EDITOR: DIANA ZAFEIROPOULOU
DTP: MINA MANTA, ELENI VALMA
PROCESSING OF ILLUSTRATIONS: BRISOTTO GIUSEPPE (Tezze - Vazzola, TV), MICHALIS TZANNETAKIS
PRINTING-BINDING: PRINTER TRENTO (Trento), ITALIA

978-960-6878-36-7
9 789606 878367